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by Bill Reed

\$14 million verdict reduced to \$500,000

The \$14 million verdict awarded a former Pennsbury High School student who lost her left leg in a bus accident was reduced Thursday to the state limit of \$500,000.

“There is no dispute that the circumstances of this case create an unfair and unjust result” Bucks County Judge Robert J. Mellon said while upholding the liability limit on school districts and municipalities. A “reevaluation of the constitutionality of the statutory cap on damages ... is necessary.”

A jury awarded Ashley Zauflik, 22, of Fairless Hills more than \$14 million in December, after a four-day trial that detailed her debilitating injury from the 2007 accident. The district conceded responsibility for the accident, in which its out-of-control bus ran over the young woman and about 19 other students.

If the bus had been owned by an outside company, Zauflik probably could have collected the jury’s award, Mellon said in his ruling. And the state cap blocked use of the district’s \$11 million insurance policy, he said.

Mellon’s ruling had been expected, but Zauflik’s lawyer called it “a major step forward on the long march” to the state Supreme Court.

“He said it loud and clear – the Pennsylvania Supreme Court needs to revisit the injustice of the current law,” [Thomas Kline](#) said.

Mellon also awarded Kline’s firm \$5,000 because Pennsbury withheld information about the \$11 million policy.