

# Chicago Daily Law Bulletin®

Volume 155, No. 41

Monday, March 2, 2009

## Jury awards \$29M to woman injured in Metra derailment

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A Cook County jury has awarded more than \$29.5 million to a woman who was seriously injured in a Metra accident nearly four years ago.

Renea Poppel, 28, was a passenger on a double-decker, five-car Rock Island Metra train on Sept. 17, 2005, that was traveling from Joliet to downtown Chicago with 185 passengers on board.

That morning, the train came to a track crossover that had a maximum allowable speed of 10 mph.

But the train entered the section traveling at 69 mph, causing it to derail. The car that Poppel was riding in hit a support beam on a bridge, and the car was pushed 14 feet into the air before it crashed down on the tracks.

Two people died, but Poppel survived. At the time, Poppel was 13 weeks pregnant.

She suffered a traumatic brain injury, a broken pelvis, broken neck and other injuries and was in a coma.

Her unborn child survived the wreck, and was delivered via a Caesarean section in January 2006. Poppel already had a son at the time of the accident, and the girl is now a normal and healthy 3-year-old, said one of Poppel's attorneys, Daniel M. Kotin of Corboy & Demetrio P.C.

The brain injury prevents Poppel from walking without assistance, and she's confined to a wheelchair. She also suffers from blurry vision and slurred speech.

At the time of the accident, Poppel was a recent college graduate who was working as an admissions

counselor at an online university.

She testified on the day before closing arguments for about 10 to 15 minutes, Kotin said. On Friday, the jury awarded \$17.5 million for her injuries and \$12 million for caretaking expenses.

"If anybody were to have sat through that trial and heard all the evidence and met Renea ... they would agree that this verdict represents justice," Kotin said.

Kotin and his colleagues presented eight doctors as witnesses.

"With injuries as catastrophic as these ... we felt it was important for the jury to meet everybody, and hear all the evidence firsthand from the individual doctors, rather than simply summarizing the story," Kotin said.

Metra offered a \$16.5 million settlement shortly before trial, Kotin said.

Poppel also was represented by Thomas A. Demetrio and William T. Gibbs of Corboy & Demetrio P.C.

The Corboy firm was appointed lead counsel for plaintiffs in the accident. It previously has settled two wrongful-death cases, for \$6 million and \$5 million each. The firm has 33 pending injury cases from the accident.

Metra was represented by John W. Patton Jr. of Patton and Ryan Ltd. He couldn't be reached for comment Monday morning.

Cook County Circuit Judge Thomas L. Hogan presided. *Bank of America, N.A. and Geraldine Edmonds, etc. v. Northeast Illinois Regional Commuter Railroad Corp., d/b/a Metra*, No. 200 L 010320 E.