

## School bus assault prompts settlement

JCPS had rejected mom's plea for bus aide

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Rhonda Martin says she just wanted Jefferson County Public Schools to protect her son, a severely autistic teenager with the mental capacity of a 3-year-old and the speech of a toddler half that age.

"He is just not capable of looking after himself," she told the Courier Journal.

Her request to the district was simple: Assign a special-needs transportation aide to ride the bus that took him to and from Ballard High School each day.

But each time she made the request, it was denied, according to school district emails provided by her attorney.

On Jan. 19, 2017, a middle school student with a behavior disorder sexually assaulted Martin's son as he was riding home on Bus 123.

The family's lawyer, William McMurry, said the 20-minute assault ended only after another special-needs student reported it to the bus driver, who later said he "forgot" to report it to his supervisors.

Now the district has paid the price. According to a document obtained this month by the Courier Journal under the Kentucky Open Records Act, the district paid the Martins \$500,000 to resolve negligence claims.

"Nothing in my career was as disturbing as watching that video," said McMurry, who was the lead lawyer for 243 victims abused by Catholic priests and other employees of the Archdiocese of Louisville. "He was unable to say no or cry out for help."

Martin said her heart sank when Ballard Principal Staci Eddleman called her and said her son, who is now 20, had been "involved in an incident on the bus that was of a sexual nature," and that police had been contacted.

"This was totally preventable and should have been prevented," Martin said.

The Courier Journal does not usually name victims of sexual assault. Rhonda Martin said she agreed to be

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