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Rockdale Jury Returns $6M Verdict After Child Burned at Camp

A pair of Atlanta litigators convinced a Rockdale County State Court jury to return a $6 million verdict to the family of a child who was burned while attending a summer camp in 2024.

October 27, 2026 at 11:34 AM By **Cedra Mayfield**



Adam P. Smith, partner with FriedGoldberg (left) and Cherise Challenger, founder and managing attorney of Challenger Law Group. Courtesy photos

What You Need to Know

- Rockdale County State Court jury returns $6 million personal injury verdict after child burned at Conyers summer camp.
- Outcome achieved by collaborating plaintiff counsel with FriedGoldberg in Atlanta and Challenger Law Group in Tucker.
- Defendant Conyers Adventist Academy and staff represented by Swift, Currie, McGhee & Hiers counsel.

A pair of Atlanta litigators convinced a Rockdale County State Court jury to return a $6 million verdict to the family of a child burned while attending a summer camp.

Collaborating attorneys Adam P. Smith of FriedGoldberg and Cherise Challenger of Challenger Law Group in Tucker achieved the seven-figure outcome opposite defense counsel with Swift, Currie, McGhee & Hiers. The plaintiff team credited their trial win, in part, to their ability to shift the jury's focus from a factual dispute about how the injured child ended up in a classroom unsupervised by an adult to the plaintiff's long-term pain and suffering.

"We spoke with jurors afterward, and they had difficulty understanding how the responsibility could be placed on 8-year-old children for simply behaving like children," Challenger told Law.com.

'Severe Burns and Permanent Scars'

Smith and Challenger represented the family of Jada Ware, an 8-year-old child who endured a serious burn while attending a summer camp at Conyers Adventist Academy in June 2024. In a complaint filed three months later in the Rockdale County State Court, Ware's mother, Jarielle Jones, named the academy and its administrative assistant, Olivia Williams, as defendants.

Per the plaintiff complaint, Williams left Ware and other minors unattended during a lunch period at the camp.

"Defendant Williams left the gym area where the campers were eating their lunch, leaving all of the campers in the gym area unattended and unsupervised. During the time period when the campers were unattended and unsupervised, another camper spilled hot water onto Jada's back, causing severe burns and permanent scars," the complaint alleged "Defendants' negligent actions and omissions, including but not limited to their

failure to use reasonable care to protect Jada from injury while she was attending their summer camp, are the sole and proximate cause of Jada's injuries and damages."

READ: Complaint

In addition to asserting claims of negligence and vicarious liability, plaintiff counsel alleged Conyers Adventist Academy failed "to exercise ordinary care in keeping its premises safe" in violation of *O.C.G.A. § 51-3-1*. Plaintiff counsel sought general, special and punitive damages on their clients' behalves, but defense counsel with Swift, Currie, McGhee & Hiers disputed liability.

Anandhi Rajan and Scott Connally represented Conyers Adventist Academy and Williams as defense counsel. In a consoldiated pre-trial order, the defense duo posited that the defendants "exercised reasonable care under the 'average responsible parent' standard applicable to negligent supervision claims of this kind."



Anandhi Rajan (left) and Scott Connally of Swift, Currie, McGhee & Hiers. Courtesy photos

Defense counsel briefed that it'd been Ware's own actions that contributed to her ultimate injury.

"On June 4, 2024, during the lunch period, math teacher Arielle McKnight was in the gym clearing tables to get the tables ready for lunch, as Ms. McKnight held her math class in the gym in the morning. Jada approached Ms. McKnight in the gym and asked to have her sandwich heated. Because the sandwich was in a plastic bag that could not be safely microwaved, Ms. McKnight instructed Jada to go to the restroom to retrieve a paper towel and then return to the gym so the sandwich could be properly heated in the microwave in the gym," defense counsel briefed. "Ms. McKnight watched Jada leave the gym through the side exit of the gym and expected her to return to the gym, but Jada did not come back to the gym but instead went to Room 211."

Instead of heeding McKnight's instruction to return to the gym after retrieving the paper towel, defense counsel briefed that Ware went to a classroom where then 15-year-old camp helper, Aniya Lee, had been warming soup in a microwave.

"Aniyah heated her lunch, a cup of noodle soup, and warned Jada to move away from the microwave, as she was taking the noodle soup out of the microwave. Jada was seated on a nearby beanbag and laughed but did not move," defense counsel briefed. "While Aniyah was removing the soup from the microwave, the paper container unexpectedly folded, causing the hot liquid to spill onto Jada. Aniyah had no reason to anticipate that the container would fail and did not believe the soup was going to spill."

READ: Consolidated Pre-Trial Order

Contending Ware's injury "resulted from an unforeseeable confluence of an unanticipated product failure and Jada's own decision not to return to the gym as instructed, following her trip to the bathroom," defense counsel argued the plaintiff's damages had not been based on the "reasonably foreseeable consequence of any conduct or decision by Defendant or its employees or agents." Defense counsel further posited that "any damages awarded should be limited to those actually and reasonably attributable to the incident."

Plaintiff counsel told Law.com they attempted to resolve the matter for $1.5 million pursuant to *O.C.G.A. § 9-11-68* but that resolution attempts stalled when defense counsel refused to offer anything over $250,000.

'$200 Per Hour Is a Reasonable Number'

With the parties remaining at odds over liability and damages, the matter proceeded to a jury trial before Rockdale County State Court Chief Judge V.T. McRae in September.

Over the course of the three-day trial, plaintiff counsel said they faced the hurdle of conveying the continuing effect of Ware's injury following her physical recovery from the burns. Rather than put the child on the stand, Smith said plaintiff counsel played portions of the discovery deposition recorded by defense counsel. Plaintiff counsel then paired that testimony with a pre-accident photograph and a post-injury deposition screenshot showing Ware wearing a jean jacket in the Georgia heat of June to conceal the burns on her back.

"The defense asked the jury to award no damages for future pain and suffering because Jada has not treated with a plastic surgeon," Smith said. "In response, we argued that her mother was placed in an impossible situation because forcing Jada to see another doctor would come with two huge risks: the risk of unintentionally reinforcing the idea that something is wrong with Jada because of how she looks, and the risk that undergoing treatment could backfire and make the marks look worse. Because of this, Jada's mother explained that she plans to let Jada make her own decisions about treatment after she turns 18."

In plaintiff counsel's closing arguments, Smith said he requested the jury award a $200-per-hour rate for Ware's pain and suffering. After highlighting for the jury that the "defense expert charged over $1,000 per hour," Smith said he pointed out that the plaintiff's request amounted to "only about 20% of that."

"I argued that $200 per hour is a reasonable number for what Jada has been through compared to the defense expert's hourly rate for the inconvenience of coming to trial" Smith said. "For future pain and suffering, we asked for $10 per hour, which was only 1% of the defense expert's hourly rate."

After less than three hours of deliberations, the Rockdale County State Court jury returned a verdict in favor of the plaintiff. In addition to allocating full liability to the defendants, the jury awarded $3 million for past pain and suffering and another $3 million for future pain and suffering.



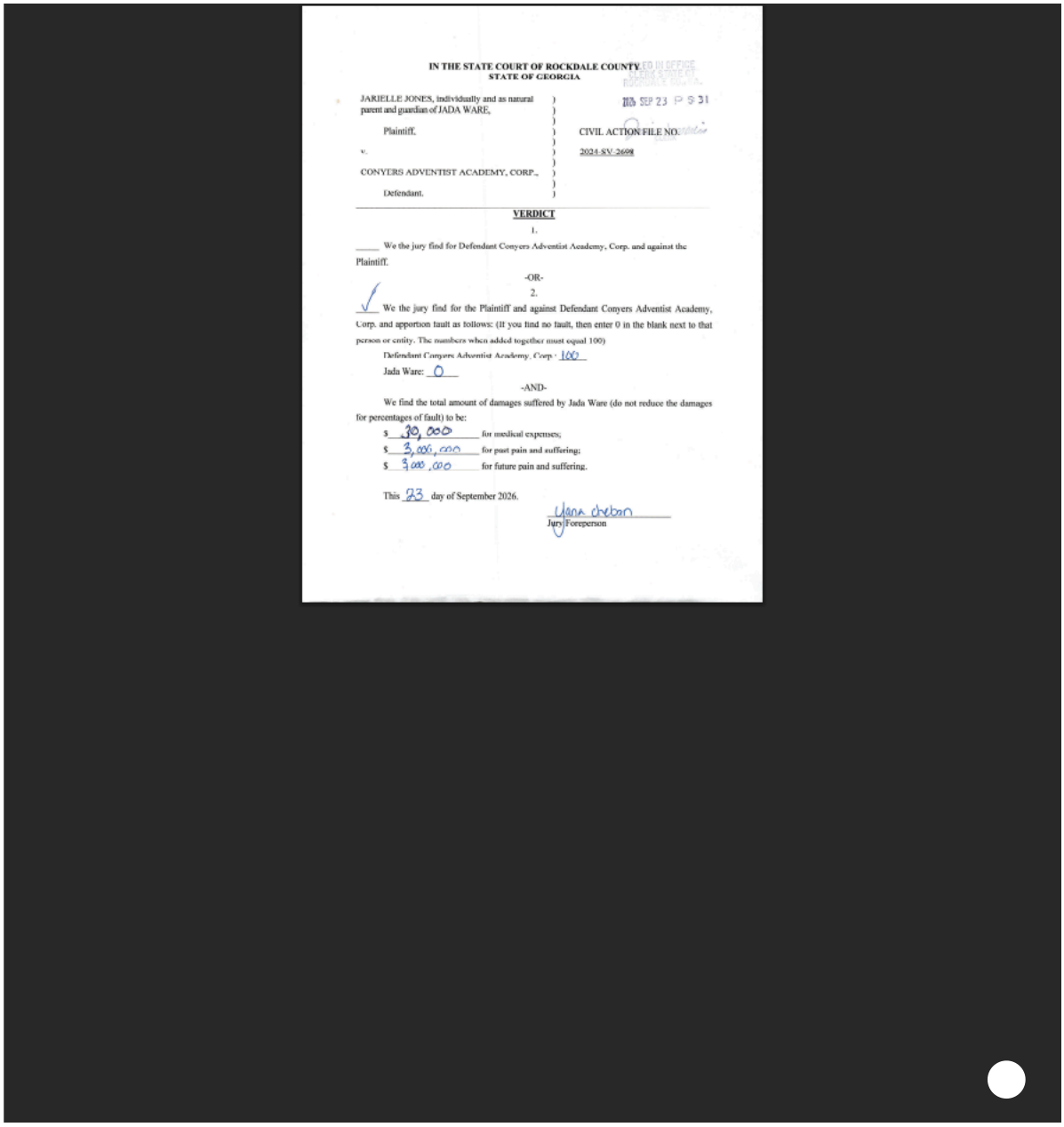
Chief Judge Vasco 'Terry' McRae, of Rockdale County State Court. Courtesy photo

READ: Verdict

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IN THE STATE COURT OF ROCKDALE COUNTY
STATE OF GEORGIA

JARIELLE JONES, individually and as natural parent and guardian of JADA WARE,

Plaintiff,

v.

CONYERS ADVENTIST ACADEMY, CORP.,

Defendant.

CIVIL ACTION FILE NO.
2024-SV-2698

VERDICT

1.

___ We the jury find for Defendant Conyers Adventist Academy, Corp. and against the Plaintiff.

-OR-

2.

✓ We the jury find for the Plaintiff and against Defendant Conyers Adventist Academy, Corp. and apportion fault as follows: (If you find no fault, then enter 0 in the blank next to that person or entity. The numbers when added together must equal 100)

Defendant Conyers Adventist Academy, Corp.: 100

Jada Ware: 0

-AND-

We find the total amount of damages suffered by Jada Ware (do not reduce the damages for percentages of fault) to be:

$ 30,000 for medical expenses;

$ 3,000,000 for past pain and suffering;

$ 3,000,000 for future pain and suffering.

This 23 day of September 2026.

Jury Foreperson

'Confidentially Resolved'

Plaintiff counsel applauded the outcome, noting it had been "an honor and a privilege" to represent the mother and daughter as clients. Smith also expressed gratitude toward the jury "for their thoughtful consideration" of the case.

"Medical expenses never tell the whole story about the amount of damages that should be awarded. Even when the medical expenses are very low, if you believe in your client's damages, don't be afraid to take their case to trial. The jury almost always gets it right," Smith said. "The jury got it right."

However, the jury might not have had the final word.

When reached for comment about the jury verdict, defense counsel Rajan revealed to Law.com that the parties reached a post-trial settlement.

"The case has been confidentially resolved," Rajan said.

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