

The Louisiana Jury Verdict Reporter

The Most Current and Complete Summary of Louisiana Jury Verdicts

September 2026

Statewide Jury Verdict Coverage since 2011

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Civil Jury Verdicts

Timely coverage of civil jury verdicts in Louisiana including court, division, presiding judge, parties, case number, attorneys and results.

Massage Chair Negligence -

An aesthetician in training was in a massage chair at a beauty college as her instructor was demonstrating skin care routines when the chair collapsed and she fell to the floor – she has treated for cervical and lumbar injuries (surgery recommended for both) and ongoing headaches – the plaintiff asked the jury for an award of \$3.75 million, the defendant valuing the case (if the plaintiff proved her case) at \$350,000, the jury settling on \$875,000 which included \$365,000 in non-economic damages

Blanchard v. Blue Cliff College, 23-3910

Plaintiff: Megan C. Kiefer and Nat

G. Kiefer, Jr., *Kiefer & Kiefer*,

New Orleans

Defense: Philip G. Watson, Kristian

Caruso and Brian G. Lebon, Jr.,

Duplass, APLC, Metairie

Verdict: \$875,000 for plaintiff

Parish: **Lafayette**

Judge: Thomas

J. Frederick

Date: 8-21-26

Taylor

Blanchard, then age

25 and six months

pregnant, was a

student at Blue

Cliff College. It is a

beauty school that

operates as a d/b/a

of Education

Management.

Blanchard was

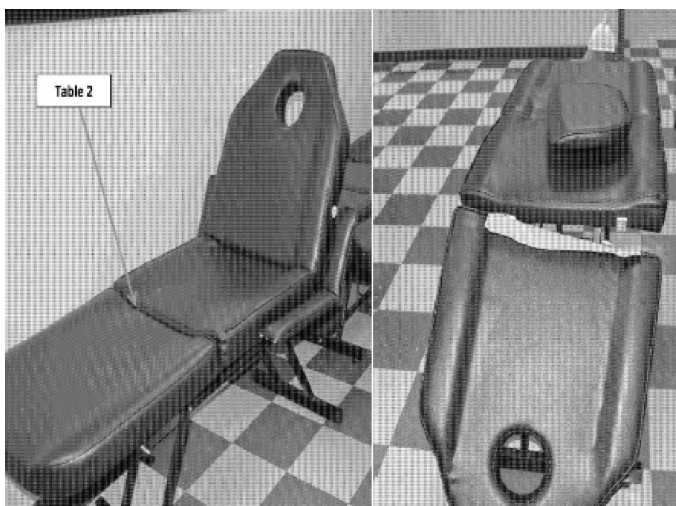
training to be an

aesthetician. On

11-21-22 she was at

school and the class was preparing for a practical session, in which the students practiced skin care techniques such as facials. That required Blanchard to serve as a model customer while another student performed the service.

Blanchard was seated in a massage chair. It was in an upright position. Suddenly the chair collapsed and Blanchard fell backwards. Her head struck the floor in the fall. She claimed she lost consciousness for 15 minutes. Blanchard has since treated for neck pain and Dr. Jason Cormier, Neurosurgery, Lafayette, has recommended a surgical repair as well as a lifetime of injections to control pain. A pain management physician, Dr. Alvah Wickboldt, administered multiple RFA injections to her neck and back. Wickboldt indicated Blanchard will need ongoing care. Blanchard has also reported headaches related to



The upright chair and then after it collapsed

Defamation - A Louisiana

Supreme Court Justice alleged he was defamed by a 2019 editorial published by The Advocate which indicated he engaged in a “mockery of justice” many years earlier when as a district court judge he was alleged dating a lawyer who represented a party before him – this wasn’t true as the lawyer had withdrawn several months before he ruled – the justice plaintiff alleged great humiliation from the editorial (his mother even asked him about it) and prevailed at trial (he was represented too at trial but often joined in sidebars and participated in the trial) on the defamation count – the justice sought \$10,000,000 in damages, the jury awarding him \$300,000 – there was an interesting aside as a few months before trial, the Louisiana Judiciary Commission issued a complaint against the justice for his alleged conduct in using campaign receipts to fund this lawsuit – the Supreme Court ruled that the complaint could remain secret until after this case was tried

Hughes v. The Advocate, 79978

Plaintiff: F. Barry Marionneaux, Plaquemine, Charles M. Hughes, Jr., Mandeville, Caleb H. Didriksen, III and Erin B. Saucier, *Didriksen Saucier & Woods*, New Orleans and Jefferson D. Hughes, III, *Pro se*, Walker
 Defense: Scott L. Sternberg, M. Suzanne Montero, J. Jacob Chapman and Chelsea B. Cusimano, *Sternberg Naccari & White*, New Orleans
 Verdict: \$300,000 for plaintiff
 Parish: Iberville
 Judge: J. Kevin Kelly
 Date: 8-24-26

The origin of this case traces back more than 25 years. It began when

Our Views: Before Jeff Hughes landed on Louisiana Supreme Court, he made a mockery of justice

Advocate editorial
 JUN 25, 2019 - 6:00 AM



2012 file photo of Jeff Hughes.

He failed that standard miserably two decades ago when he presided over a controversial custody case while he was, according to several people, romantically involved with one of its lawyers.

His behavior, brought to light this week by an Advocate investigation of the long-ago legal battle, should alarm voters who have elected him to the state's highest court. Maybe they would have made another decision if they had known of Hughes' sordid conduct, which attracted the attention of the FBI when he was a state judge in Livingston Parish.



RELATED
 Records: Louisiana Supreme Court Justice was subject of FBI probe — and he apologized

The fact that citizens generally didn't know about it is an even bigger scandal. It points to a pervasive lack of transparency in Louisiana's judicial system — a problem that hampers accountability and compromises confidence in how justice is carried out.

Some of the details of the custody dispute are mentioned in an unrelated court case. That information, along with other documents The Advocate located, form the basis of what we know. Some documents were suspiciously missing from the official record. And, since the records of the state's Judiciary Commission, which disciplines judges for bad behavior, aren't routinely made public, we don't know what, if anything, was done to address Hughes' clearly unethical behavior.

The facts that have made it into the light of day read like a horror story. In 1998, while on the state bench in Livingston, Hughes was romantically involved with lawyer Berkley Durbin, according to several people familiar with the situation. Even so, he didn't recuse himself from a custody case and related legal matters involving a five-year-old boy named Austin Nicholson. Durbin represented Austin's mother, who was fighting for custody even though her boyfriend, who would become her husband, had been accused of scalding Austin in a tub of hot water.

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Hughes refused to recuse himself and ruled in favor of Austin's mother, though child welfare officials strenuously objected. The case was eventually turned over to another judge, and in 2004, Hughes wrote a note to the boy's grandmother in which he appeared to apologize for his conduct, saying it was “inimical to the pursuit of the truth and that, because of my actions, justice suffered. For this, I am deeply remorseful.”

If Hughes were truly remorseful, he'd speak publicly about the case, which prompted an FBI probe that ultimately did not produce any charges against him.

Sadly, without basic transparency, the public doesn't know how many other abuses have occurred in Louisiana's judiciary and what was done about them.

State lawmakers had a chance last session to approve a bill making the records of the judiciary commission public. They balked, no doubt because many legislators are lawyers who

The June 2019 editorial that was the subject of this lawsuit

Thomas, Neurosurgery. He believed that the crash had only resulted in a temporary aggravation of pre-existing conditions and no surgical intervention was needed. A second IME, Kevin Greve, Neuropsychology, was unconvinced Dardar suffered a brain injury and it was "not possible" there was anything beyond a minor concussion. Moreover that concussion (to the extent there was one at all) was in Greve's view "exceedingly mild."

The jury in this case deliberated for an hour. It found Henry at fault and that he was in the scope of his employment at the time of the collision. The jury separately found for Dardar on the negligent hiring, training and supervision count. The jury assessed fault 80% to Henry and the remainder to A&D Airboat.

The jury then moved to damages. It answered for Dardar that she was injured. She took medicals of \$24,957 and \$50,000 more for future care. The jury rejected lost wages and future lost earning capacity.

Dardar took non-economic damages totaling \$300,000 in a total of six categories. The awards were \$50,000 each for past and future categories of pain and suffering, mental anguish and loss of enjoyment of life. The husband's consortium claim was rejected. The verdict totaled \$374,957 and a consistent judgment was entered on 8-13-26.

Historical Louisiana Verdict

Bus Negligence - The plaintiff suffered a catastrophic leg injury when a municipal bus door closed on her leg and then the bus ran her over – she took a record \$14.6 million verdict in 1989 that was reduced to \$10.06 million on appeal

Bernard v. Regional Transit Authority

Plaintiff: Evan F. Trestman,
New Orleans

Defense: Wood Brown, III,
New Orleans

Verdict: \$14,648,594 for plaintiff

Parish **Orleans**

Judge: Bernette Johnson

Date: November 16, 1989

Marilyn Bernard, age 24, was at the beginning of a promising and charmed life in 1985. She'd graduated with a biology degree from Xavier and was on track to get a Ph.D. in tropical medicine at Tulane. This day she was headed to her job as a teacher and was boarding a Regional Transit Authority (RTA) bus at Canal and Basin.

As Bernard stepped onto the bus, the driver (Whitney Jones) closed the door on her leg. She was trapped. Bernard screamed and banged on the door with her umbrella. Jones drove off. She kept screaming as did others who saw the predicament. Jones opened the door and Bernard fell free. In an out-of-the-frying-pan-and-into-the-fire moment, the bus then ran over Bernard's leg and dragged her sixty feet.

Bernard suffered a catastrophic injury. There was a sound as her leg seemed to burst open, the bones in it being pulverized. A friend who saw it was shocked at the seriousness of the crush injury. Bernard subsequently underwent more than

20 surgeries and many more were expected.

Bernard sued RTA and alleged negligence by its driver. RTA conceded fault. Bernard's damages were enormous. As the case went to the jury, her lawyer asked for an award of \$19,000,000. The defense thought \$1.5 million would be fair. Bernard was in the hospital at the time of trial and she testified by deposition. She described how her life was turned upside down, a romantic relationship ending and her career aspirations being shattered.

After a four-day trial in New Orleans, Bernard took \$14,648,594 in damages. That included future medicals of \$5.95 million. Her general damages were \$6.525 million. The \$14.6 million verdict would be almost \$40,000,000 in 2026 dollars.

RTA appealed and the Court of Appeal, Fourth Circuit ruled in November of 1991. Judge Barry wrote for the court and mostly affirmed the verdict. However the court did not remit some of her damages (the general damages to \$5.024 million and the medicals to \$3.82 million) leaving a net result of \$10.067 million.

After all the appeals were exhausted, Bernard collected a total of nearly \$17,000,000 including costs. The case was described as the largest single plaintiff's compensatory damage personal injury award in Louisiana history at the time. Attorney Trestman died in 2025 and his obituary said that he was best known for the verdict in this case.

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