



Deadly Champion Bus Crash Put College Softball Team In A Coffin On Wheels Says Victim's Lawyer Todd Tracy In Lawsuit

DALLAS, TEXAS January 31 , 2017 -- The families of three North Central Texas College (NCTC) women's softball players that were killed in a Champion Defender Bus accident in 2014 will talk at a news conference on Wednesday about their pursuit of justice in the wake of the suicide by the truck driver who hit the bus.

A news conference will be held at the Dallas [Crash Lab](#) of The Tracy Law firm at 3:30 PM on Wednesday, February 1st. Todd Tracy, a nationally recognized vehicle crashworthiness lawyer, represents the families of three victims in a wrongful death [lawsuit](#) filed against the [Champion Bus Company](#) which is a subsidiary of the [REV Group](#) Specialty Vehicle Manufacturers.

"The families of these three promising young women have lost their opportunity to find closure to this tragedy in the criminal justice system. Now we turn to the civil court system up in Gainesville, Texas. The public needs to know that these college athletes were put on Interstate 35 inside a deadly and dangerous bus that I wouldn't use for transporting cabbage much less our children," said Tracy.

Fifty-five year old Russell Staley was set to be tried in Davis, Oklahoma on four counts of first degree manslaughter for sideswiping the bus while likely under the influence of synthetic marijuana according to the National Transportation Safety Board ([NTSB](#)). Staley committed suicide at his home in Saginaw, Texas last Friday according to the [Tarrant County Medical Examiner](#).

"Mr. Staley was clearly racked with guilt and sadly took his own life because he felt responsible for the deaths of these young athletes. However, we have not seen or heard any remorse from the Champion Bus Company even though their bus tore apart like a cheap tomato can," said personal injury lawyer [Todd Tracy](#). "I was dumbfounded by the pretrial testimony of the engineering manager for Champion Bus who says he did not have a single criticism of the way the Champion Defender Bus performed in this fatal bus crash that killed four young ladies even though the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) [accident report](#) concluded the bus lacked structural integrity. Moreover, Champion Bus could not even define what a bus is by definition. Nor does the company have a written occupant protection philosophy. Any company that is that clueless does not deserve the privilege of transporting our most precious cargo."

The 2008 [Champion Defender Bus](#) that claimed the lives of four of the 15 women that were returning to their college in Gainesville from a scrimmage in Oklahoma will be on display. In response to news media requests, Tracy who has handled more than 2700 vehicle defect cases against every major vehicle manufacturer will point out the numerous structural design flaws that caused the women to suffer deadly ejections from the bus.

According to Tracy's engineering investigation for the lawsuit as well as the accident investigation conducted by the NTSB, the 2008 Champion Defender Bus body panels were constructed with screws or adhesives (glue) and not with metal rivets typically used on buses. Joints in the area between the sides and the lower roof failed and disintegrated in the accident. Missing welds and poor welding techniques were also identified as a cause for the structural collapse.

"It's the opinion of our [team of experts](#) that much of the steel tubing used in the side and roof structure of the Champion Bus was no stronger than lawn furniture. I certainly don't want my children, or your's, riding in buses that are not designed, developed and tested using state of the art material and engineering technology. Our children deserve better. Champion Bus should feel ashamed and finally accept responsibility for putting this team in a coffin on wheels," said Tracy.

According to the lawsuit, the Champion Defender Bus does not meet the minimum school bus joint strength standard. The sidewall joints failure exposed the occupants to greater risk of injury.

Also, the Champion Defender Bus does not use advanced window glazing which would have minimized the potential for full ejection or partial ejection.

The bus rolled over following the collision ejecting Megan Richardson and Jaiden Pelton seated on the driver's side and partially ejecting Katelynn Woodlee seated on the passenger side.

National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) studies have indicated that when a person is ejected from a vehicle there is a 13 times greater risk of serious injury or death. Forty-seven percent of occupants killed in rollovers have been ejected from the vehicle. For decades the vehicle industry has known that 3-point seat belts (lap and shoulder) are inherently safer than only lap belts, and that 3-point seat belts provide better protection from ejection.

The lawsuit alleges that the Champion Bus was defective and unreasonably dangerous because it was only equipped with lap belts.

Champion Bus, Inc. is the nation's leading manufacturer of motor vehicles and commercial buses for the small to mid-size markets with dealers in 32 states. Champion Bus targets the sale of its Defender bus to institutions of higher learning such as North Central Texas College for use in long distance travel. The Champion Defender medium-sized 32 passenger bus is built in Imlay City, Michigan.

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Case Reference: Cause No. CV16-00080 Cooke County, Texas 235th Judicial District

News Conference Time and Place

Wednesday February 1, 2017

3:30 PM CST

The Tracy Firm Crash Lab

4701 Bengal St.

Dallas, Texas 75235

214-324-9000

The News Conference will be streamed on Facebook Live at

<https://www.facebook.com/toddtracylawfirm/>

Family Members Present for (deceased victims):

(Megan Richardson)

Teresa and Ronnie Richardson

Wylie, Texas

(Katelynn Woodlee)

John Woodlee

Windom, Texas

(Jaiden Pelton)

Audrey and Christi Pelton

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