

Parents Fight Riddell's Bid To Move Defective Helmet Lawsuit

By **Jonathan Capriel**

Law360 (February 19, 2025, 7:21 PM EST) -- Parents of a high school football player who suffered severe brain injuries due to an allegedly faulty helmet are urging a Texas federal judge to reject sports equipment maker Riddell Inc.'s bid seeking to transfer the litigation to a different court, saying the current location is "far more convenient" for most witnesses.

Parents Terry and Susanne Reid balked at Riddell's claim that the Tyler courthouse in the Eastern District of Texas is a better venue because it is a "shorter drive" for Houston-based witnesses compared to the Marshall courthouse where the suit was filed. Almost no one is going to be making the more than three-hour drive from Houston to either Tyler or Marshall, because they will be taking a plane, the Reids said in their Tuesday **filing** opposing transfer.

Marshall is fairly close to the Shreveport Regional Airport, which has direct flights to Houston, they said. Meanwhile, Tyler's closest airport doesn't, and Riddell has already stated that many of its witnesses are based in Illinois and will need to fly into Texas, they said.

"This court has repeatedly recognized the advantage that the Shreveport airport gives the Marshall division over the Tyler division for out-of-state witnesses," the parents said. "Marshall's proximity to the Shreveport airport, with its flight options, often weighs in favor of venue remaining in Marshall when the witnesses are not located in either Marshall or Tyler."

Additionally, Riddell's argument that witness travel costs must be the "single most important factor" the court should consider when picking a venue is undercut by the fact that the two courthouses are "relatively" a "short difference in distance" between each other — about 60 miles.

The parents' lawsuit, filed in September, claims that their son Cooper Reid suffered a traumatic brain injury during a high school football game in Troup, Texas, in September 2022. At the time, the then 16-year-old was wearing a Riddell SpeedFlex helmet, which the parents' claim was defectively designed and failed to protect him from the impact that caused his injury.

Their suit claims Cooper cannot feed or bathe himself and needs 24-hour care. He also undergoes extensive medical treatment, much of which has taken place in Houston, the parents said.

The company filed a motion to **transfer** the case to Tyler in January, arguing that the injury occurred in Troup, which is within the Tyler Division's territory, and that many of the witnesses, such as Cooper's coaches and first responders, are located in or near Tyler, so it would be more cost-effective for them to head to Tyler than Marshall. Additionally, the company noted that the Reids live closer to Troup.

While it is true that the Reids have a home there, the reality is that they spend most of their time in the Houston area now so their son can get medical attention. They are more likely to fly from Houston to the courthouse rather than drive from Troup, they argued.

The parents additionally said Riddell is overemphasizing the costs of driving to Marshall over Tyler.

"Riddell is wrong about the significance of this factor," the parents said. "The better view, at least with regard to witnesses who are not relying upon air travel, is that this does not carry substantial weight given the relatively short difference in distance between the Marshall and Tyler courthouses."

Riddell is represented by Jeff Ray of Ray Pena McChristian PC, and David J. Duke and Jonathan L. Smith of Bowman & Brooke LLP.

The Reids are represented by Russell Post and Nicholas Bruno of Beck Redden LLP, Jennifer Ainsworth of Wilson Robertson & VanDeventer PC, Richard Warren Mithoff and Janie Jordan of Mithoff Law, and Otis Carroll Jr. of Carroll Maloney Henry & Nelson PLLC.

The case is Reid et al. v. Riddell Inc. et al., case number 2:24-cv-00731, in the U.S. District Court Eastern District of Texas.

--Additional reporting by Elaine Briseño. Editing by Adam LoBelia.