

# Northwestern Memorial hit with \$18.5 million verdict in case of boy born with disabilities

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Chicago Tribune

SEPTEMBER 27, 2018, 6:30 AM

**A** Cook County jury has awarded \$18.5 million to the family of a northwest Indiana boy who was born with disabilities after doctors at Northwestern Memorial Hospital allegedly prescribed inappropriate medication to his mother during pregnancy.

Charles Muhammad, of Merrillville, was born in 2006 with a buildup of fluid in the brain, spina bifida and other “permanently debilitating abnormalities,” according to the lawsuit, filed in 2012 in Cook County Circuit Court. The lawsuit alleged that the medical problems were caused by a drug, Depakote, prescribed to his mother before and during her pregnancy to treat mental illness.

“Depakote was well known within medical and mental health care communities as a drug that could cause serious, debilitating birth defects to a developing fetus” and was not recommended for use in women who were pregnant or could become pregnant, according to the lawsuit.

Despite that knowledge, physicians prescribed the medication to Muhammad’s mother, Angie Muhammad, in 2005, and increased her dosage even though she told her doctors that she might be pregnant, according to the lawsuit.

The suit alleged that Northwestern was negligent in prescribing the medication despite knowing she was at high risk of pregnancy given her mental illness and an earlier failure to use birth control properly.

Northwestern spokesman Christopher King declined to comment Wednesday on the case or whether Northwestern would appeal.

Marvin Brustin, an attorney for the family, said it is pleased with the verdict. Charles, now 12, has the mental capacity of a 5- or a 6-year-old, Brustin said. “He’s going to have medical bills for the rest of his life,” he said.

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