

III. Jury Awards \$49.5M To Ethiopian Air Victim's Family

By **Lauraann Wood**

Law360 (May 13, 2026, 6:00 PM EDT) -- Illinois federal jurors awarded \$49.5 million Wednesday to the family of a global health worker who died alongside 156 others when a Boeing jet carrying Ethiopian Airlines Flight ET 302 crashed within minutes of takeoff.



Boeing lost at trial Wednesday when a jury awarded a crash victim's family \$21 million for the victim's experience on a fatal Ethiopian Airlines flight, \$16.5 million for the family's loss of companionship and \$12 million for the kin's grief. (Nurphoto via AP/Joan Valls)

The jury deliberated for nearly two hours before awarding crash victim Samya Stumo's family \$21 million for her experience on the fatal flight, \$16.5 million for the family's loss of companionship and \$12 million for the grief, sorrow and mental suffering her family has and will continue to experience because of her death.

The verdict caps a week of evidence and testimony jurors heard in the second damages trial against Boeing stemming from the 2019 Ethiopian Airlines crash, which came within seven minutes of takeoff and just five months after another Boeing 737 Max jet carrying passengers of Lion Air Flight 610 crashed under similar circumstances.

Counsel for Stumo's family told Law360 in a written statement that "we are gratified for the opportunity to try the compensatory damages case."

"Next, we will seek appellate reinstatement of the punitive damages claims against the Boeing executives and the component part manufacturers," they said.

A representative for Boeing told Law360 in a written statement, "We are deeply sorry to all who lost loved ones on Lion Air Flight 610 and Ethiopian Airlines Flight 302."

"While we have resolved nearly all of these claims through settlements, families are entitled to pursue their claims through the court process, and we respect their right to do so," the statement continued.

The family had requested damages in a range between \$406 million and \$746 million, but Boeing attorney Dan Webb of Winston & Strawn LLP argued during trial closings earlier Wednesday that roughly \$21 million would more fairly and reasonably compensate the family's loss.

The jury should refrain from granting the family's damages request because their attorney, Shanin Specter of Kline & Specter PC, "pulled those numbers out of thin air" as he offered such a "huge ballpark" range of compensatory damages without any evidentiary support for the recommendation, Webb argued during his closing.

"I don't know of any explanation" for the request "other than that's asking for excessive damages ... to punish Boeing and not just based on compensating the plaintiffs in this case," Webb said.

Boeing suggested instead that the jury should award Stumo's family \$2.745 million for the emotional distress she experienced as the company's 737 Max 8 jet struggled to remain airborne before ultimately crashing back down to earth, \$8.25 million for the loss of companionship her family has and will continue to experience and \$10 million for the family's grief, sorrow and mental suffering, Webb told the jury.

Stumo's estate was also entitled to damages for any physical pain and suffering she experienced on the flight. But expert testimony during trial suggested the gravitational forces that affected the plane never reached a level that would have caused Stumo or the other passengers a physical injury during its nearly seven minutes in the air, Webb argued.

And while Stumo's family carries the burden of proof on that issue, "not one" of their three expert witnesses provided any testimony or evidence suggesting the so-called G forces were strong enough to physically injure Stumo before Boeing's jet hit the ground, the attorney argued.

"Emotional distress, though, is another issue," Webb said. And Stumo's family is entitled to a "significant" amount of money for that aspect of damages because evidence showed that she would have unquestionably begun to fear for her safety within the flight's final two-and-a-half minutes, he told the jury.

Boeing's \$2.745 million recommendation on that front would represent paying her estate \$5,000 for 2 minutes and 9 seconds of that final airtime during which Stumo would have likely started feeling concerned, and \$100,000 for each of the 21 final seconds during which she would have unquestionably felt "stark fear" as the plane began nose-diving to the ground, Webb said.

Counsel for Stumo's family suggested awarding between \$20 million and \$30 million for her experience on the plane, but "the only reason" he would make such a recommendation would be to punish Boeing based on speculation, "which you're not supposed to do," Webb argued.

Awarding Stumo's family an amount closer to Boeing's recommendation would provide her parents and brothers with the financial security and peace of mind "to take whatever time they need, seek whatever support they need" as they continue to live their lives honoring Stumo's while also healing from her loss, Webb argued.

"But there is a point at which money does everything it can," he told the jury.

Specter's closing blasted not only Boeing's damages recommendation but also the idea that financial security should be the jurors' focus as they deliberate the appropriate compensation for losing the "glue" that held the family unit together.

"They're not here for a handout from Boeing to pay a mortgage or a light bill. They'll provide for their own financial security," Specter said. "To argue to you that this is about providing financial security is to try to change what this case is about. It's a diversion. Do not fall for it."

Boeing's suggested award for the family's loss of companionship represents \$50,000 a year for each family member from the date of the crash through the rest of their lives. But the recommendation is "grossly inadequate" because it breaks down to just \$5.71 per hour for the loss of a dearly cherished daughter and sister who led such a promising life, Specter argued.

"It is abjectly unreasonable, and outrageously so," he told the jurors.

Beyond the damages request for Stumo's in-flight experience, the family's damages request represented between \$2 million and \$3 million for each family member's grief and loss of companionship in the years since she died; between \$1 million and \$2 million for the loss of companionship each family member will experience for the rest of their lives, and the same range for their ongoing grief and sorrow.

Webb recognized during his closing argument that the loss of Samya is enormous, and the family agrees, Specter said.

But "an enormous loss caused by wrongful conduct requires an enormous verdict," he argued.

Stumo boarded the Ethiopian Airlines flight headed to her first major assignment with global health organization Thinkwell, Specter told the jury during **trial openings**. Working for the nonprofit was her dream job after studying Spanish and anthropology at the University of Massachusetts and receiving a master's degree in public health from the University of Copenhagen in Denmark, he said.

She'd won many awards, published several scholarly papers and given numerous presentations along the way, Specter said. She was also on a path toward marriage with a UMass doctoral student she met while studying in Peru for her undergraduate thesis, he said.

But as Boeing's plane spent minutes pitching up and down and ultimately dove to earth with enough force to create a 33-foot crater upon impact, Stumo surely knew her promising life "was about to end ... in a particularly brutal manner," Specter told jurors earlier in trial.

Lawsuits over the crash have proceeded in consolidated litigation before U.S. District Judge Jorge Alonso, who has set previous trial dates in the case but eventually called them off as the cases settled. The previous case set for trial settled on **the morning** of opening statements, and the only other case that made it past openings ultimately settled the morning before jurors said the estate of a U.N. environmental worker who also died in the crash should receive **\$28 million**.

Boeing is accused in the litigation of taking shortcuts in safety in pursuit of profits as it rushed the design and development of the 737 Max and an automated feature that affected the jet's flight handling and controls, the Maneuvering Characteristics Augmentation System.

Accident investigators and official review panels have since determined that the MCAS was vulnerable to faulty sensor readings that could trigger the system and push the plane into a nosedive. Following a 20-month global grounding, the Federal Aviation Administration cleared the 737 Max to fly again in November 2020 after Boeing developed a software fix and enhanced pilot training.

Stumo's family is represented by Shanin Specter and Elizabeth Crawford of Kline & Specter PC and Joseph Power Jr. of Power Rogers LLP.

Boeing is represented by Dan Webb, Linda Coberly, Christopher Essig, Julia Johnson, Samuel Zuidema and Sandra Edwards of Winston & Strawn LLP and Jon Buck of Perkins Coie LLP.

The individual case is Michael Stumo et al. v. The Boeing Co. et al., case number 1:19-cv-02281, and the consolidated case is In re: Ethiopian Airlines Flight ET 302 Crash, case number 1:19-cv-02170, in the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Illinois.

--Editing by Linda Voorhis.

Update: This story has been updated with comment from Boeing and Stumo's family.