

## VERDICTS & SETTLEMENTS

# Teen workers settle with Branson performer in sexual misconduct suit

■ ALAN SCHER ZAGIER

A Branson illusionist and his employers have agreed to pay a total of \$5 million to two teen workers who alleged that 38-year-old performer Reza Borchardt “systematically groomed” the women while minors to engage in inappropriate sexual contact.

According to a Taney County Circuit Court lawsuit, Borchardt (known professionally as Reza Illusionist) was accused of sending “hundreds of extremely sexually explicit messages” to the two 17-year-olds via Instagram and Snapchat, including videos and photographs of him masturbating.

He was further accused of routinely threatening the plaintiffs’ employment, disparaging them to coworkers, and improperly tracking their movements online and deleting incriminating messages on their cell phones.

“After successfully grooming plaintiffs over a period of months, defendant Borchardt used his position of power, both as an adult and as their work superior, to engage in inappropriate sexual contact with the minor children on numerous occasions,” a trial brief reads.

Court documents indicate that State Farm Insurance agreed in January to pay settlements in the case to each of the women – \$3 million to Katie Van De Carr, a former Miss Teen Missouri, and \$2 million to Jayden Harris – but that Borchardt and his three corporate codefendants sought to block the payments unless the two

women signed confidentiality agreements preventing them from publicly discussing the matter.

The revised offer reportedly included an additional \$50,000 in additional compensation.

The women declined, instead suing for breach of contract when the approved settlements were not fulfilled. The court brief notes that a recently passed state statute known as “Trey’s Law” prevents non-disclosure agreements related to childhood sexual abuse actions from being enforceable in Missouri.

Prior to the agreement, the defendants had also asked the court to restrict public access to court filings in the case, arguing that such disclosure would cause “damage and embarrassment” to Borchardt.

The lawsuit named as defendants Borchardt; Skyline Entertainment, LLC; Branson Theatre, LLC; Gracie Gray Entertainment, LLC and State Farm Fire & Casualty, alleging negligent infliction of emotional distress, negligent hiring, negligent retention, negligent supervision, and violations of the Missouri Human Rights Act while the two teens worked on the show, “Reza-Edge of Illusion.” Both women are no longer employed at the theater.

The settlements were subsequently agreed to on Aug. 1, five days before a scheduled court hearing, records provided by lead plaintiff’s attorney Samuel Wendt show.

Borchardt continues to perform in Branson, said lead defense attorney Warren Harris, adding that his client maintained his relationship with Van De Carr was consensual. The defense attorney is not related to the second plaintiff with the same last name.

### ***\$5 million settlement Personal injury (sexual misconduct)***

### **Breakdown and distribution of total value:** \$3 million to Van De

Caar; \$2 million to Harris

**Venue:** Taney County Circuit Court

**Case Number/Date:** 2546-CC00034/August.1, 2025

**Insurer:** State Farm (for defendant)

**Caption:** Katie Scarlett Van De

Carr and Jayden L. Harris v. Reza

Borchardt; Skyline Entertainment,

LLC; Branson Theatre, LLC; Gracie

Gray Entertainment, LLC; and State

Farm Fire & Casualty Co.

### **Plaintiff’s attorneys:**

Samuel Wendt (lead) and Nick

Hillyard; Wendt Law Firm,

Kansas City

### **Defendant’s attorneys:**

Warren Harris (lead); Turner,

Reid, Duncan, Loomer & Patton,

Springfield; David Steelman;

Steelman, Gaunt & Crowley, Rolla;

Thomas Hearne; Hearne & Pivac;

Springfield; Joseph Passanise;

Wampler & Passanise, Springfield