

## **PARENTS OF ALLEGED MOLESTATION VICTIMS PLAN TO SUE SCHOOL DISTRICTS**

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Lawyers representing Jacqueline Hunt of Chino and the Ramirez family of Rancho Cucamonga will file the claims against the county superintendent of schools and Central, Chino Valley Unified and San Bernardino City Unified school districts for being negligent in handling allegations against Eric Norman Olsen. To date, prosecutors have filed 11 child molestation counts against Olsen, 28, who has pleaded not guilty and remains in county jail in lieu of \$2 million bail.

Two of the counts stem from allegations made by daughters of Hunt and Denise and Manuel Ramirez. Both girls were classmates at Valle Vista School in Central School District on Dec. 20, when Olsen was a substitute teacher for the first-grade class.

The two girls, whose names have been kept confidential at the parents' request, told their mothers after school that day that Olsen had them sit on his lap on several occasions and touched their thighs.

Manuel Ramirez said his daughter, who once loved going to school, has changed greatly since the incident.

"This has taken up our whole lives. I keep thinking, 'What's my daughter going to be like?' " he said. "I'd just like to go back to some kind of normalcy."

His wife, Denise, recalled picking up her daughter, who was 6 years old at the time, from school that day. She remembered her daughter saying it was the worst day of her life.

"She told me, 'The substitute kept rubbing my thighs. He said he liked how my tights felt,' " Denise recalled.

The Ramirez family met with Principal Susan Kohn later in the afternoon who questioned their daughter about Olsen's behavior. Later that day, the Ramirezes were informed by Kohn that Olsen was fired and banned from teaching in the future.

"She told us, 'We've already handled it.' And she kept saying because (my daughter) was wearing tights, that he didn't touch her, it wasn't skin on skin and that it was not illegal," said Denise Ramirez.

Kohn would not comment on the remarks citing pending litigation but said the school was careful in following the right steps.

"We did contact our legal counsel to make sure we handled it in an appropriate manner. We wanted to follow

all the laws regarding the allegations because he has rights as well," said Kohn.

Gregory Bentley of the Claremont-based law firm Shernoff Bidart Darras said the law considers the touching of intimate body parts or the clothing covering them to be sexual assault.

"The school district has violated both girls' innocence," said Bentley, who is representing Hunt and the Ramirez family. "The system needs to change."

Bentley said the four school agencies subject to the governmental claims did not report the allegations to the appropriate agencies and did not properly train employees in handling allegations as serious as child molestation. Bentley said if Chino Valley Unified and San Bernardino City Unified had notified appropriate authorities when Olsen taught there, he may have been stopped prior to being employed at Central School District.

The Ontario resident has worked in at least 17 school districts across San Bernardino, Riverside and Kern counties. Ontario police arrested Olsen on Aug. 3 after complaints arose from a 10-year-old girl at Berlyn School in the Ontario-Montclair School District.

Parents of the two Valle Vista students said they assumed Olsen had stopped teaching after their complaints last December and were shocked to find out he continued to teach in 2006 after hearing news of his arrest in August.

According to the police, Olsen has admitted to letting girls sit on his lap up to 200 times while he was a substitute teacher.

Central School District Superintendent Sharon Nagel said the school district filed two complaints to San Bernardino County's Department of Children's Services the day after Hunt and the Ramirez family lodged their complaints. The district also notified the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing, said Nagel, and within a week, the district received confirmation from children's services that law enforcement had been informed.

However, the Sheriff's Department has said it has no record of the allegations from December.

Under the California Reporting of Child Abuse and Neglect Act, schools are required to inform either law enforcement or children's protective services when complaints of sexual abuse arise. Both agencies are then required to cross report.

Complaints about Olsen first arose in October 2004 when he taught at Howard Cattle Elementary at the Chino Valley Unified School District. Spokeswoman for the district Julie Gobin said she does not know whether the complaints were sexual in nature but that Olsen had been banned from teaching since. Gobin said the complaint was forwarded to the county superintendent of schools.

Claims documents accuse both Chino Valley Unified and the county superintendent of schools of failing to notify appropriate authorities mandated by law based on the incident at Howard Cattle Elementary.

In April 2004, the San Bernardino City Unified banned Olsen from teaching there after a complaint was made when he taught at Muscoy School. According to the district, there was no reason to suspect the complaint was sexual in nature and therefore did not warrant reporting to police or children's services.

In a statement released Thursday, Dr. Arturo Delgado, superintendent of San Bernardino City Unified, wrote,

"The crimes that Olsen has been charged with cast a shadow over the thousands of excellent teachers and substitutes that work in our district."

Bentley said he suspects more parents will come forward in regard to Olsen, and it is possible that additional claims may be filed in the future.

The school agencies will have 45 days to respond to the claims, which also include ones filed by the parents for emotional distress. After the agencies respond, the families will have six months to file a lawsuit.

"Olsen should have no contact with a child ever again," said Hunt.

The Chino resident said she has since enrolled her daughter in a different school district and has put her through counseling.

"But she keeps asking, 'Can I just forget about it?' " said Hunt.

Parents say both girls are particularly afraid now when there is a substitute teacher at school.

"We felt that our child was safest at school," said Manuel Ramirez. "They were supposed to be protected."

Wendy Leung can be reached by e-mail at [wendy.leung@dailybulletin.com](mailto:wendy.leung@dailybulletin.com) or by phone at (909) 483-9376. Lawyers representing Jacqueline Hunt of Chino and the Ramirez family of Rancho Cucamonga will file the claims against the county superintendent of schools and Central, Chino Valley Unified and San Bernardino City Unified school districts for being negligent in handling allegations against Eric Norman Olsen.

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