

## NEWS

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### **Sexual Abuse Victims File Civil Lawsuits Against Jehovah's Witnesses Vermont Congregation and National Organization**

#### ***Childhood Victims Suffered Sexual Abuse from Congregational Leader***

**Burlington, VT, September 30, 2014** – Irwin M. Zalkin of The Zalkin Law Firm and Jerome O'Neill of Gravel & Shea, filed two sexual abuse civil lawsuits today against the Bellows Falls Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses, located in Bellows Falls, Vermont and the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc. The lawsuits were filed on behalf of two women who were minor children when their families were active in the Congregation at the time of the alleged abuse.

According to the civil complaints, two sisters, Annessa Lewis and Miranda Lewis, were sexually abused as children by Norton True, who was a "Ministerial Servant", a congregation leader at the time. Miranda Lewis was abused at approximately age 5 and on several occasions thereafter. The complaints also allege that True began sexually abusing her older sister, Annessa, when she was approximately age 4 while taking her to visit horses in his barn.

The complaints detail another incident several years after this alleged abuse began, at a going away party being held at True's home for another family leaving the Bellows Falls Congregation. The complaints allege that at that time, he attempted to isolate Miranda Lewis in his barn. The girl's mother noticed True's actions, and promptly took her two girls to their car. True followed the Lewis family to their car where Miranda asked when True was going to touch her again. The complaints state that Annessa was also in the car when Miranda Lewis made this statement, at which point, she volunteered that she believed her younger sister because True had touched her too.

Following this incident, according to the complaints, the mother reported the abuse allegations to the Elders at the Bellows Falls Congregation. The Elders did initiate a meeting between the girl's mother and True. No apparent action was taken against True nor was any warning given to members of the Congregation of the danger he posed to children. The Bellows Falls Congregation never reported the alleged abuse to any child protective or police agency. The complaint also alleges that the Congregation Elders were aware that the perpetrator had a prior history of sexual abuse of at least one child, yet he was still allowed to be alone with children in the Congregation.

The complaints allege that the defendants named in the case, the Bellows Falls Congregation, the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., the Christian Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses, Inc. and un-named other defendants were all negligent in their legal duty to protect the minor children in their care and failed in their duty to prevent the perpetrator, Norton True, from sexually molesting children. The complaints also allege that the defendants owed a duty to investigate and not employ the perpetrator and failed to conduct a reasonable investigation of the alleged abuse.

"Once again we see how Elders within the Jehovah's Witnesses continue to protect child sex abusers by blindly following the company line," said Irwin Zalkin, of The Zalkin Law Firm, the co-attorney for the Lewis sisters. "These innocent children had their lives ruined by this Congregational leader and this religious organization, who suppressed its knowledge of a child predator within the Congregation by following the policies imposed by the Governing Body of the Jehovah's Witnesses to keep such information secret at all cost to avoid scandal and public scrutiny."

As a result of the abuse, the complaints allege that both sisters suffered great pain and emotional suffering that prevented them from experiencing the normal enjoyment of life and requiring medical and psychological treatment. The complaints also claim that they both suffered the loss of earnings and earning capacity.

These lawsuits are among several sexual abuse lawsuits that have been filed in the last year against the Jehovah's Witnesses by The Zalkin Law Firm. The firm now has similar cases pending in California, Connecticut, New Mexico, and Ohio. The Zalkin Law Firm is associating in this case with attorney Jerome O'Neill, of Counsel at Gravel & Shea, Burlington, VT. The complaint asks for compensatory and punitive damages and costs.

#### **About The Zalkin Law Firm**

With offices in San Diego and New York, [The Zalkin Law Firm](#) is one of the premier sexual abuse and personal injury law firms in the country. The firm's lawyers have represented hundreds of survivors of childhood sexual abuse and achieved groundbreaking results in numerous high-profile clergy abuse cases across the United States. The Zalkin Law Firm has aggressively represented hundreds of survivors of child sexual abuse, including former Boy Scouts. The firm has negotiated over \$200 million in settlements in Catholic clergy sex abuse cases.

#### **About Jerome O'Neill, Co- Attorney. Gravel & Shea PC**

[Jerome O'Neill](#) is a graduate of Georgetown University Law School and was admitted to the District of Columbia Bar in 1971. Since 1981 he has been in private practice in Burlington and was the senior partner of O'Neill Kellner & Green for 26 years. He joined the firm of Gravel & Shea in Burlington as Of Counsel in January 2014. His practice specializes on commercial litigation, products liability & personal injury and representing sexual abuse victims. He also teaches on trial advocacy topics for the American Association for Justice throughout the United States.