

Branford Attorney Takes on Sexual Abuse of Children, Jehovah's Witnesses

Steven M. Mazzacane | Posted: Wednesday, October 1, 2014 11:29 pm

Editors Note: The following includes accounts of sexual abuse of a minor.

A Branford attorney is taking a lead role in bringing one of the first child molestation lawsuits against the Jehovah's Witnesses in the state of Connecticut.

Attorney Tom McNamara, a Branford resident and partner in the New Haven based McNamara and Goodman Law firm, announced Wednesday at a New Haven press conference that 4 separate suits are being filed against the Jehovah's Witnesses in a case that involved a series of child molestation incidents in a New Haven congregation.

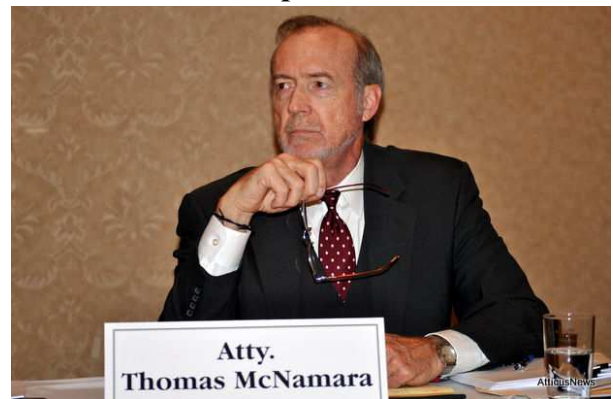
McNamara and his co-counsel, Irwin Zalkin of a San Diego based Zalkin Law Firm, presented the cases of four plaintiffs, three girls and one boy, all of whom were under 18 at the time of the alleged sexual abuse, and in some cases, where the child was as young as 6.

"There lawsuits derive from sexual abuse of these young women and their brother at the hands of an ordained minister, a "ministerial servant," of the Jehovah's Witnesses," explained Zalkin. Zalkin stated that he has been involved in about 25 cases against the Jehovahs Witnesses. McNamara would also state this suit is the first in CT.

The suits allege that Orlando Afanador, 50, was a ministerial servant, and appointed position in the Jehovah's Witnesses, and a regular pioneer, a position which requires a minimum amount of hours be spent in the door-to-door ministry the Witnesses are well for.

Afanador is currently listed on the Connecticut Sex Offender Registry, after a conviction in 2010 in Nebraska.

The filings detail that Afindor would often babysit 3 of the plaintiffs, who were siblings and lived with their mother, an overnight nurse. The initial sexual abuse began here. In time, Afanador and his wife moved in with the family, serving as regular sitters for the children.



McNamara

Branford's Tom McNamara, who has spent much of his legal career handling sexual abuse cases in religious organizations, is handling a case where four plaintiffs are filing suit against the Jehovahs Witnesses.

The filing reads that “Afanador would enter the plaintiff’s room in the middle of the night and would begin kissing her legs and thighs. He would then proceed to perform oral sex on the Plaintiff as well as digitally penetrate the Plaintiff.”

The plaintiff was 8 years old at the time. The filing reads that the conduct...”occurred on an almost nightly basis for approximately one year.”

The filings indicate that on occasion the younger sister was also present in the room, and the detail other instances of sexual abuse.

Attorney Zalkin would not give specific details but indicated that Afanador has been involved in multiple additional cases of sexual abuse of a minor.

The documents, which list the East Spanish Congregation of Jehovah’s Witnesses in New Haven as the defendant, lay out the case against the Jehovahs Witnesses organization as a whole.

"The Jehovah’s Witnesses have an insidious problem, an epidemic problem with child sexual abuse with the organization. And the reason why they have this problem is because of the policies that come from their parent organization, the Watchtower and the head of all Jehovah’s Witnesses in the world, the Governing Body of Jehovah’s Witnesses. The problem is this: they are more concerned about protecting themselves, the institution, from scandal, and protecting its reputation above their concern and protection of children,” said Zalkin. “And they have instituted policies that require absolute silence that would prevent anyone from the outside world from ever know the problem’s that they’ve had with abuse of children.”

The filings indicate that before joining the Spanish congregation where the children were members, Afanador was a member of a separate congregation, where he, according to the complaint, “molested two children of a Jehovah’s Witness family.” The abuse was reported to the “elders” of the congregation, who then convened a Judicial Committee and reproved Afanador.

Jehovah’s Witness policy is that when a member goes from one congregation to another, a letter of introduction is sent, and in the case of child molesters, the letter must inform the new congregation of the past sexual abuse issues.

Soon after, as a member of the new congregation, Afanador was appointed a Ministerial Servant and soon after, engaged in the acts alleged in the complaint.

The complaints allege that the injuries sustained by the then-minors “were the result of the negligence and carelessness of the Defendants and their agents” and that the Jehovah’s Witnesses should have known about Afanador’s history of sexual abuse, that they failed to supervise Afanador in his interaction with minors, that they failed to report the conduct to authorities, and that they continued to use him as a Ministerial Servant and pioneer despite the obvious issues.

One of the victims stated they were moved to come forward after the case of Candace Conti in California, who was abused as a 9 year old girl by a member of a Jehovahs Witness congregation. The Conti case raised significant awareness of the issue when a jury awarded her a 28 million dollar verdict in 2012. The Conti case was also the first to see a jury verdict, as previous suits often resulted in settlements.

In the Conti case, evidence was shown that elders in the congregation took steps to cover up the abuse, as was Jehovahs Witness policy at the time. Additionally, the perpetrator in the case was a "rank-and-file" member. In the current case, the perpetrator held at least two appointed positions in the congregation, ministerial servant and pioneer, and the claim is that his previous history of sexual abuse of a minor was known prior to those appointments.

"It was just incredible to me that she would do that," stated one of the victims, "and it just brought out that there were so many victims in that organization...it was just like, ok, we need to speak out so others in our area know...there are more of us out there."