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Jehovah's Witnesses Ordered to Pay \$13.5M to Bible Teacher's Alleged Victim

By [Andie Adams](#) and [Rory Devine](#)

The National Organization for Jehovah's Witnesses was ordered to pay \$13.5 million to a San Diego man who says he was abused as a child by his Bible teacher. NBC 7's Rory Devine reports on Oct. 30, 2014. (Published Thursday, Oct 30, 2014)
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A San Diego man who says he suffered "very aggressive abuse" as a child by his Bible study teacher was awarded a \$13.5 million judgment Wednesday against the organization that oversees Jehovah's Witnesses churches.

Jose Lopez, now 35, was one of eight children who have accused Gonzalo Campos of sexually abusing them between 1982 and 1995, according to his lawsuit against the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, the entity that oversees Jehovah's Witness churches.

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Campos served in the leadership of the Linda Vista Spanish Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses and Playa Pacifica Spanish Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses in Pacific Beach, Lopez's attorney Irwin Zalkin told NBC 7.

In about 1986, when Lopez was 7 years old, Campos was first introduced to him as a fatherly figure who could teach him about the Bible. Instead, Campos used his position and time alone with Lopez to groom him, Zalkin said.

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"After a period of grooming him, which Campos was very adept at, one day he took him and he seriously molested him in a private residence," Zalkin said. He believes Campos took his victims to a home his mother cleaned in La Jolla.

Zalkin said the high amount the judge awarded reflects the abuse's impact on Lopez, who he said has suffered post-traumatic stress disorder, addiction and trust issues as a result.

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He said punitive damages made up \$10.5 million of the judgment, and were awarded as a result of how Watchtower responded to the accusations against Campos.

"Damages that reflect the reprehensible conduct of the Watchtower in how they covered this up for years and allowed multiple children to be injured," said Zalkin. "They protected and harbored a criminal."

The Watchtower told NBC 7 it plans to appeal the judgment, saying the award given after a hearing at which it was barred from participating.

"Jehovah's Witnesses abhor child abuse and strive to protect children from such acts," the organization said in a statement. "The trial judge's decision is a drastic action for any judge to take given the circumstances of the case. We will seek a full review of this case on appeal."

As for Campos, Zalkin said he is in Mexico, where he moved as soon as they started investigating this case.

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