

## San Diego Reader



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# Jehovah's Witnesses get relief from appellate court

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## Judge Lewis could have gotten documents with lighter sanctions in Linda Vista case

By [Dorian Hargrove](#), [Oct. 15, 2016](#)

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The Watchtower Tract Society, commonly referred to as the Jehovah's Witnesses, is asking a San Diego Superior Court judge to return the bond money it posted as a result of an August ruling from a California appellate court which found the \$13.5 million dollar sexual assault judgement against the church was too harsh.

The church filed the motion to return the bond money on October 7.

Jose Lopez, now aged 38, filed his lawsuit in June 2012 alleging that elder church member, Gonzalo Campos, of the Linda Vista Spanish Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses molested him during bible study sessions when he was seven years old.

Campos had been accused of molesting young boys before. According to Lopez's complaint, senior church officials were aware of his behavior before the incident with Lopez had occurred. Three years before Campos allegedly assaulted Lopez, a 12-year-old boy who shared a room with Campos accused the then-18-year-old Campos of trying to have sex with him. During the following years, seven other church members lodged similar accusations against Campos, as well as the church for trying to bury the allegations. Now, only two complaints remain; Lopez's case, which will be sent back to the trial court for a new judgement amount, and a lawsuit from former Linda Vista congregation member Osbaldo Padron.

[Padron](#) sued Campos and the church over similar molestation charges in 2013. In that lawsuit Padron claims that Campos molested him on numerous occasions in 1994 and 1995. In June of this year, superior court judge Richard Strauss, [as reported by the Reader](#), imposed \$4000 per-day sanctions on the church for failing to turn

over documents to Padron's attorneys during discovery. The church has since filed an appeal over those sanctions. The appellate court has yet to rule on the appeal.

In Lopez's case, the church appealed the \$13.5 million judgement, as well as additional sanctions against the Jehovah's Witnesses in August of this year. In its appeal the church claimed judge Joan Lewis should have imposed less severe sanctions.

The appellate court's August 2016 ruling: "We conclude the court erred in ordering terminating sanctions because there was no evidence that lesser sanctions would have failed to obtain Watchtower's compliance with the document production order and because there were other possible sanctions that could have effectively remedied the discovery violation. On remand, the court has broad discretion to start with a different sanction that does not wholly eliminate Watchtower's right to a trial."

According to court documents, Travelers Casualty and Surety Company of America issued two bonds to the court on behalf of the Jehovah's Witnesses in 2014. One of which totaled \$20.2 million while the other was for \$56,698.

The two sides will be in court on October 20 to discuss the motion.

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