



## JUDGE ORDERS JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES TO TURN OVER INTERNAL DOCUMENTS RELATED TO CHILDHOOD SEXUAL ABUSE

April 12, 2018

On April 5, 2018, Judge James Manley of Sanders County, Montana ordered the Jehovah's Witnesses religious organization to produce documents and testimony related to internal reports and investigations into the childhood sexual abuse of NPR's two clients.

In this case, the two Plaintiffs were sexually abused as children by a member of the Jehovah's Witnesses. The Elders in the local Jehovah's Witness congregation in Thompson Falls, Montana were aware of the abuse and failed to report it to the police, choosing instead to handle the reports and investigations internally pursuant to Jehovah's Witness guidelines. Their decision not to report the abuse to authorities allowed the perpetrator to remain in the congregation and continue to abuse one of the Plaintiffs.

Throughout this case, and similar childhood sexual abuse cases across the country, the Jehovah's Witnesses have refused to produce documents related to their internal handling of reports of sexual abuse and related investigations and disciplinary actions claiming that the information is protected by the clergy-penitent privilege and the First Amendment to the United States Constitution.

Through briefing to the court, NPR convinced the Judge that Defendants' privilege claims were unsupported and improper under the law. The Court agreed that Defendants could not blanket everything related to their investigations in secrecy and that they must turn it over to the Plaintiffs. Often, this is the very evidence that can win or lose a case like this against a religious institution.

The case of *Nunez, et al. v. Watchtower Bible & Tract Society of New York, et al.* is set to go to trial in September of 2018.

The plaintiffs in this case are represented by NPR partner D. Neil Smith and associate Ross E. Leonoudakis.

