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Jehovah's Witnesses to settle sex-abuse case

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Victim filed lawsuit six (6) years ago

By [Dorian Hargrove](#), [Jan. 12, 2018](#)

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A lawsuit is now settled between a former victim of sexual abuse and Jehovah's Witnesses. According to the court's website, the case is under a "conditional settlement." The terms and conditions of the settlement are not public.

José Lopez filed the lawsuit back in 2012, nearly 20 years after church elder Gonzalo Campos molested him and several other young children who were members of the Linda Vista congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses.

[As reported by the Reader](#), Campos, who fled to Mexico to escape criminal charges, admitted to committing the acts to Lopez's and another victim's attorney, Devin Storey, while giving testimony in one of the cases.

"I touched him in his private parts," Campos testified.

Attorney Storey: "Did you touch his penis?"

Campos: "Yes."

Storey: "Did you penetrate him?"

Campos: "Yes. Yes."

Storey: "How many times?"

Campos: "More than once. I don't know."

In 2009, five other alleged victims sued the Watchtower and Bible and Tract Society of New York, the governing body of Jehovah's Witnesses, over the molestation by Campos and the Watchtower's refusal to act.

That case settled for an undisclosed amount in 2012, the same year that Lopez filed his lawsuit and a year before another victim, Osbaldo Padron, filed his.

Then, in 2015, a state court judge ruled that the Watchtower had failed to cooperate with discovery in the Lopez case. The judge awarded a \$13.5 million judgment in favor of Lopez.

The Watchtower later [appealed the decision and managed to get the decision rescinded and promised to produce the requested documents](#).

Meanwhile, a fight over documents was also occurring in Padron's case, the one filed shortly after Lopez's lawsuit.

At issue was Watchtower's refusal to turn over a letter from headquarters that asked for the names of alleged sexual abusers in the church.

But at the same time other documents had been released by the Linda Vista congregation, which showed the congregation and headquarters were aware that Campos had sexually assaulted young boys and a girl but still considered him eligible to return to the congregation.

"In our meeting with him he said he was very repentant for what he did," wrote an elder at Linda Vista's congregation to Watchtower headquarters in New York in 1999.

"He stated that he wanted to return to Jehovah. He is willing to face the victims and ask their forgiveness. He now wants to obey Jehovah. Before, when he would speak to people on the platform he would not meditate on what he was doing. Although he needed to confess, he felt shameful and had fear of mankind. He would deceive himself thinking that he could continue serving as an elder. Now he realized that he could not change

without help. Ever since his expulsion he has not abused anyone. He has read articles of the publications regarding his sin. He says he does not see or read pornographic information. He stated that ever since expulsion he has worked on having a relationship with Jehovah and the expulsion has served to strengthen him spiritually. He does not miss meetings, and he even takes notes of the program. He also said that he is willing to continue accepting Jehovah's discipline."

While the two sides continued to fight over discovery in the Lopez case, another judge issued sanctions against the Watchtower for refusing to turn over documents in the Padron case.


The Watchtower also appealed that decision as well.

As covered by the *Reader*, [in November a state appellate court](#) rejected the appeal, sending the case back to state court and keeping the \$4000-per-day sanctions in place.

Meanwhile, as the Padron case was heading back to state court, attorneys for Lopez and Watchtower agreed to settle the Lopez case.

Lopez's attorney, Irwin Zalkin, did not respond to a request for comment prior to publication of this article.

There is no word yet whether Padron's case has also been settled. A hearing is scheduled for next month.

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