

Delaware Attorney General: Sussex Co. Jehovah's Witnesses congregation didn't report child abuse

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The Delaware attorney general's office is suing a Jehovah's Witnesses congregation in Sussex County, claiming that elders failed to report an unlawful sexual relationship between a woman and a 14-year-old boy, both of whom were congregation members.

Oral arguments in the civil action are set for November.

Authorities say elders learned in January 2013 that Katheryn Harris Carmean White was having sex with the boy and failed to immediately call a child abuse hotline.

The congregation's attorney argues that the elders are protected by clergy privilege from the reporting requirements, similar to the confidentiality of a church confessional.

Carmean White, who worked as a teacher's aide at Seaford Middle School, was later convicted of rape and child endangerment and sentenced to six years in prison.

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Steve McRoberts

So the elders are concerned about protection for themselves, but not for the children. What kind of stupid morality is that?

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Kerry Louderback-Wood · Georgia State University

It's been held by many courts that the clergy privilege does not apply to the JW Judicial Committee hearings because it is made in a confidential environment. Rather, the testimony giving in their internal hearing is made in front of 3 elders, communicated to headquarters throughout the process from allegation to post-findings. Besides, California courts have consistently held that the church can not use privilege as a cloak to protect itself from reporting requirements.

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