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Tough to build Jehovah's Witness sex-abuse case

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Without documents, says plaintiff, he can't get justice

By [Dorian Hargrove](#), [April 24, 2016](#)

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On Friday, April 29, an attorney for Osbaldo Padron will ask a judge to impose severe sanctions on the Jehovah's Witness Church for refusing to turn over documents. The documents allegedly show the church was aware of sexual abuse committed over decades by a San Diego-based church leader on young boys, such as Padron.

The request for sanctions is the latest development in a childhood sex-abuse scandal that has rocked the [church in several countries in recent years](#). In San Diego, the case is the ninth against church leader Gonzalo Campos; seven settled out of court.

In 2013, according to a [2014 article in the Union-Tribune](#), a judge ordered the Jehovah's Witness Church, also known as the Watchtower, to pay José Lopez \$13.5 million for covering up sexual abuse he suffered at the hands Campos. In Lopez's case, he was seven years old in 1986 when Campos sexually abused him in a bathroom during a Bible-study outing.

Campos's history of molestation of young boys went beyond the eight victims, according to Padron's 2013 lawsuit.

In 1982, then-18-year-old Campos allegedly tried to have sex with his 12-year-old roommate. The boy fought back, hitting Campos multiple times with a bat. The boy told church leaders and they promised to investigate. Four years later, Campos was again accused of molesting children, including Lopez and the other seven people who later filed lawsuits.

In 1987, Campos joined the Playa Pacific Spanish Congregation of the Jehovah's Witness Church. According to the lawsuit, leaders of the congregation were aware of the accusations against Campos. Despite this, he was continually promoted to a leadership role for the congregation.

In 1994, several more complaints surfaced against Campos. In April of that year, an alleged victim's parents wrote to church leaders asking for an investigation. Months later the letter was forwarded to church officials at Watchtower headquarters in New York. It was at that time that Campos was allegedly molesting then-seven-year-old Padron.

Padron filed his lawsuit in September 2013. Since filing, says the recent request for sanctions, church officials and their attorneys have stonewalled in turning over documents, despite a March 2015 court order requiring them to do so.

Among the documents requested is a March 14, 1997, "Body of Elders" letter that was sent to congregations throughout the world requesting detailed information on alleged sexual abuse by church leaders. The letter, and subsequent responses generated during the following years, would show that leaders at the New York headquarters and throughout the church were aware of childhood sex abuse by church elders. But the church has refused to comply. And even when doing so they have turned over heavily redacted documents.

"...Watchtower produced documents that redacted the names of victims, elders, perpetrators, congregations (as well as the addresses and contact information of the congregation), towns where abuse occurred, law enforcement agencies that investigated claims, and other material," reads a newly filed court document. "The redactions are so extreme that Plaintiff cannot make use of them. Plaintiff submitted a sampling of these redacted documents to the discovery referee and this Court, who each agreed that the redactions are so broad as to undermine Plaintiff's ability to use them.

"This court determined the requested documents were relevant, unprivileged, and that production would not be overly burdensome. This court also specifically addressed third party privacy, stating: 'all personal, identifying information pertaining to any third party/victim should be redacted from the documents to address any privacy concerns.'"

In a court motion, Padron's attorney, Irwin Zalkin, says the court must get tough with the church and issue terminating sanctions compelling church leaders and their attorneys to follow orders. If granted, terminating sanctions would impose fines on the church for each day it fails to turn over the documents. If the documents are still not produced after a reasonable amount of time, the judge could order dismissal of the case and render judgment against the Watchtower, the Playa Pacific Spanish Congregation, and Campos.

The motion, as well as a request from the Playa Pacific Spanish Congregation for summary judgement, will be heard in department 75 at 9 a.m. on Friday, inside the San Diego Superior Court building downtown.

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