

Utah Jehovah's Witnesses church forced woman to listen to audio of her rape, lawsuit says

By Courtney Tanner The Salt Lake Tribune
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Courts • Jehovah's Witnesses instructor is accused of several assaults between 2007-08.

A woman is suing a Jehovah's Witnesses church in Weber County after, she says, one of its instructors repeatedly raped her when she was a minor and the organization's leadership forced her to listen to an audio recording of one of the assaults.

The woman filed the lawsuit Wednesday in 2nd District Court, accusing the Kingdom Hall of Jehovah's Witnesses church in Roy — as well as naming the alleged perpetrator, several church leaders and the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society (the religion's headquarters located in New York) — of knowingly allowing the "unfit" instructor to rise to a position of authority without warning members of his "dangerous propensities" and past sexual transgressions.

No representative of the Roy church, 1950 W. 4400 South, responded to a voicemail from The Salt Lake Tribune requesting comment Thursday.

The Tribune generally does not identify alleged victims of sexual assault. Because the man accused of assaulting the woman in this case has not been charged with a crime, The Tribune is not identifying him. It is not clear whether she reported the alleged incident to police, but members of the faith are encouraged to bring problems to elders in the church, rather than to outside authorities.

The girl's interactions with the instructor began in summer 2007, the lawsuit states, when she attended a movie with him. When driving her home from the theater, the instructor took her phone and told her she had to kiss him on the cheek to get it back. When she refused, he kicked her out of the car and drove off, returning a short while later to pick her up.

The purported assaults escalated from there, according to court documents, as the man three times bound the girl's wrists and ankles with duck tape, placed a sock in her mouth and covered her head with a pillowcase, leaving her alone in the backseat of his car for one to two hours each time.

Beginning in December 2007, the lawsuit states, the man took the girl to a parking lot several times and "aggressively" kissed her and touched her despite her protests. After that, she says, he raped her and forced her to perform oral sex, with at least three such encounters in or about January 2008.

He allegedly lured her out of her home by threatening to harm her family if she did not comply. It is unclear how old the man was during the purported assaults, but she was a minor.

In April 2008, the Roy church formed a judicial committee to investigate whether the girl engaged in inappropriate sexual behavior — "a serious sin" in the religion. During the meeting that included her mother and stepfather, the lawsuit states, church leaders played a recording of one of the purported rapes, obtained from the instructor, for four to five hours "repeatedly stopping and starting the audio tape ... suggesting that she consented to the sexual behavior."

The church, the woman says, acted irresponsibly by knowingly allowing the instructor to serve in a position of authority overseeing underage members. She believes the organization did not do enough to warn adherents of the man's "dangerous and exploitative propensities" and



instead promoted him as being “in good standing and trustworthy.”

A leader from the congregation apparently warned the girl’s parents in November 2006 that the instructor — who previously attended church sessions in Ogden and Oregon — was a “bad kid” who had “engaged in inappropriate sexual behavior with a female member of the Clearfield congregation.” The plaintiff says that warning wasn’t enough.

The girl suffered physically and emotionally after the nonconsensual sexual encounters, the civil suit states, especially having to relive them through the audio recordings.

She is suing over intentional infliction of emotional distress, negligence and failure to warn.

She’s asking for a jury trial, as well as damages to exceed \$300,000 to cover medical care, lawyer fees and general damages.

The girl was a member of various Jehovah’s Witnesses congregations until shortly after the assaults. Her case was dismissed in November 2015 for failure to serve the defendants in a timely manner. She was able to refile because the dismissal was not based on the lawsuit’s merits.

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