



Lasting Damages

Teen at the center of Salinas High sex abuse case prepares to sue district, ex-counselor.

BY ARVIN TEMKAR

A 15-year-old alleged victim in a sex-abuse case involving a former Salinas High School counselor has started the process to sue the school district, the counselor and the organization that placed the counselor at the school.

The boy and his mother have retained a prominent Los Angeles attorney who specializes in child sex-abuse cases.

A Feb. 28 claim names the Salinas Union High School District, Olivares, and Olivares' former employer, Sunrise House, an organization that places substance-abuse counselors in schools.

Olivares was initially arrested March 14, 2012, after the teen's family found inappropriate messages Olivares allegedly sent via Facebook and went to the police. A week later Olivares, then out on bail, was arrested again after police found videos of students having sex in his Salinas High School office taken with a hidden iPhone camera.

Authorities have identified 11 victims in the 13 videos Olivares allegedly filmed having varying degrees of sexual contact in his office.

The boy who filed the claim was 14 when Olivares was arrested.

The school district won't comment because of the potential lawsuit, according to SUHSD Superintendent Tim Vanoli. Sunrise House board member Chris Callihan, a Salinas assistant city attorney, says this is the first incident of the kind in the organization's history.

"We received the claim, and we've turned it

over to Sunrise House's legal counsel, who will be responding to it appropriately," Callihan says.

Olivares now faces 53 criminal charges, including allegations of molestation, child pornography and committing lewd acts with a child.

David Ring, attorney for the 15-year-old and his mother, says the aftermath of the incident has been trying for the family. "Gilbert really set this kid back in years," Ring says. "It was the worst thing that could happen."

The school district has 45 days from the date the claim is filed to accept or reject it. If it's rejected, as Ring expects it will be, he will file suit in Monterey County Superior Court.

The damages demanded in the government claim are "in excess of \$10,000," a standard legal practice when filing such claims, Ring says. The attorney doesn't yet have an amount the victim's family is seeking, but says the damages will be significant.

Meanwhile, the criminal case against Olivares hasn't budged since last October, when prosecutors and Olivares' defense attorney tried to set a date for a preliminary hearing. Since then there have been two more such hearings; the next is scheduled for April 17.

None of the other alleged victims have filed claims against the school district or approached Ring about representation.

Ring, a personal injury lawyer, has been involved in a number of recent high-profile molestation cases. He represented seven victims in a massive case against the Los Angeles Unified School District, which announced earlier this month it would pay \$30 million

to settle 58 claims filed by students and parents in the case of alleged molester and ex-elementary school teacher Mark Berndt.

Neither the alleged Salinas High victim nor his family wanted to speak with reporters, but Ring says they're struggling to cope.

"They've had a real tough time since this has happened," he says. "The minor victim has had some serious struggles, and so has his mom." ❏

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On Defense: Former counselor Gilbert Olivares (left) is named in a claim against the Salinas Union High School District. So far only one of 11 identified victims has taken legal action.

