



News Release

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Childhood Sexual Abuse Case Filed Against Monterey Bay Academy

Case is the latest in a pattern of child sex abuse at the private school, with several cases filed against the school since 2004

Santa Cruz, California – Attorneys from Greenberg Gross and Jeff Anderson & Associates filed a lawsuit against Monterey Bay Academy on behalf of childhood sex abuse survivor Timothy Hassler. They filed an amended complaint, naming the Central California Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, the religious organization that runs the private school, and the General Conference Corporation of Seventh-day Adventists, which oversees the Central California Conference. This case is the latest in a pattern of abuse that occurred at the school, where more than one teacher took advantage of young children.

The case was filed under the California Child Victims Act (AB 218). The case seeks to hold Monterey Bay Academy accountable for negligence and negligent supervision of Lowell Nelson, the teacher who assaulted and sexually abused Mr. Hassler.

“I have been living with the pain and trauma of sexual abuse for decades,” said survivor Timothy Hassler. “Monterey Bay Academy failed to protect me and other students from Nelson’s abuse. Nelson took advantage of his position of authority and my vulnerability to repeatedly assault me. As a 14-year-old and like so many other survivors, I was scared to come forward for fear of not being believed. Today, I am standing up for myself and for others who were victimized at Monterey Bay Academy.”

In 1971, Mr. Hassler enrolled in Monterey Bay Academy as a 14-year-old freshman student. As noted in the complaint, Nelson used his position of authority to groom Mr. Hassler shortly after Mr. Hassler arrived on campus. Nelson, like the students and other teachers at Monterey Bay Academy, lived on campus and would invite Mr. Hassler to his residence on campus.

At his on-campus residence, Nelson started offering Mr. Hassler marijuana and playing pornographic films in front of him. The complaint states that Nelson then exposed himself and began sexually abusing Mr. Hassler. Nelson told Mr. Hassler that if he reported Nelson’s acts, no one would believe him. This continued until Mr. Hassler dropped out of school to avoid further sexual assaults.

“We are proud to stand with Mr. Hassler in his fight for justice and accountability,” said attorney Deborah Mallgrave of Greenberg Gross. “Monterey Bay Academy and the Central California Conference of Seventh-day Adventists failed to protect Mr. Hassler when he was an underage

student living on campus. This case will expose this failure and help ensure this does not happen to other students.”

In 2004, several child sexual abuse lawsuits were filed against Nelson, Monterey Bay Academy and another teacher at [Monterey Bay Academy, Ronald Eugene Wittlake](#). Monterey Bay Academy and Seventh-day Adventist Church eventually settled those suits.

“The survivor and other young boys suffered humiliation, shame and horror, and they will continue to suffer for the rest of their lives,” said attorney Brian Williams of Greenberg Gross. “The case filed on behalf of Mr. Hassler details yet another instance of abuse perpetrated by Nelson against children and the problem of child sexual abuse at Monterey Bay Academy. By stepping forward, Mr. Hassler is raising awareness and protecting others going forward.”

You can find the full complaint attached.

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