

# **OAKLAND JURY HOLDS JEHOVAH WITNESSES RESPONSIBLE FOR SEXUAL ABUSE OF FREMONT CHILD**

An Alameda County Superior Court jury has found the Jehovah's Witnesses legally responsible for the sexual abuse of a 9 year old former Fremont girl. The verdict, announced Wednesday June 13, found that the Elders who managed the North Fremont Jehovah's Witness Congregation in the 1990s knew perpetrator Jonathan Kendrick had sexually molested another child, but kept his child abuse secret from the parents and families with children in the Congregation. Kendrick went on to repeatedly sexually molest Candace Conti, now 26, over a two year period, using Jehovah Witnesses activities such as door to door neighborhood soliciting as his way to secretly gain control over his young victim. Kendrick was eventually convicted in 2004 of the sexual abuse of another young girl, and is now a Registered Sex Offender in California.

The key issue in the case, according to the victim's attorney Rick Simons of Hayward, was the written policy of Watchtower New York, Inc., which instructed all Elders in Jehovah's Witnesses Congregations in the United States to keep reports of child sex abusers within Jehovah's Witnesses secret to avoid lawsuits. The case is believed to be the first in the nation to directly address the policy of secrecy, adopted in 1989, and still in force today.

Ms. Conti stated "I once wanted to be the best Jehovah's Witness I could be. Now I feel I'm doing more to help other children in Jehovah's Witnesses than I ever did walking door to door to spread the 'good news'. The jury awarded \$7 million dollars in damages, and will return Thursday to deliberate on whether or not punitive damages should be awarded.

Candace Conti spent 2 years trying to convince the Jehovah's Witnesses, both in Southern California and in Fremont, to change the secrecy policy, but finally gave up and filed her lawsuit in 2011. "This young woman, who experienced brutal abuse as a child, could not tell anyone for several years, and has walked for many years in a nightmare of depression and isolation, has shown incredible courage in facing the powerful and secrecy laden organization that betrayed her into the hands of a monster" said Mr. Simons of his client.

The verdict came in the courtroom of Judge Robert McGuiness in Dept. 22, Oakland.

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Domain Web case #: HG11558324 (Jane Doe v. Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc.)