

Lawsuit: Driver abused student

East Irondequoit school district blamed

JUSTIN MURPHY

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The East Irondequoit Central School District faces a lawsuit from the family of a girl with disabilities who, according to her lawyer, was sexually abused by a school bus driver in 2014.

The lawsuit, filed Aug. 25, names as defendants the district, its school board, several top administrators and Renaldo Vega, the bus driver who was arrested in 2014 on charges of forcible touching and endangering the welfare of a child.

Vega was fired upon his arrest in December 2014. The lawsuit, however, alleges the district should have prevented the alleged sexual contact in the first place — especially since Vega had been arrested the previous year on similar charges.

According to the lawsuit, Vega drove the school bus that took the girl (identified only as Jane Doe) to her daily program at BOCES. There were originally two students on the bus, but the other student was suspended in early December 2014. Over the next week, “Vega began a pattern of conduct that included sexual grooming, intimidating, inappropriately touching, sexually harassing, sexually abusing and sexually assaulting Jane Doe,” according to the lawsuit.

The girl began to cut and mutilate herself, at which point she told her parents about Vega. They called the police Dec. 10, and Vega was arrested and fired. He later pleaded guilty to endangering the welfare of a child but not to the forcible touching charges.

In October 2015, Vega was sentenced to three years probation, with some sex offender provisions, Assistant District Attorney Joseph Plukas said.

The girl, according to the lawsuit, suffered “severe emotional trauma” and “exacerbation of preexisting mental health and emotional health issues.”

The lawsuit alleges the district and school board failed in their oversight duties. In particular, it points out that Vega was arrested in October 2013 for “(acting) in a manner injurious to a child.” Robert King, the girl’s lawyer, said that incident took place in the city of Rochester, and that charges eventually were dropped. Vega was already a bus driver for East Irondequoit at that point, and he was suspended for a week after the 2013 arrest. The lawsuit alleges the district had a responsibility to investigate that incident further before giving Vega his job back. It also cites shortcomings in the hiring, training and oversight procedures that resulted in Vega being alone with the girl on the school bus. The district declined comment on the case but released a statement saying it followed all the proper steps, from notifying the police and cooperating in their investigation to suspending and firing Vega “after following the necessary processes required by law.”

“The school district strongly denies each and every allegation made against the school district and its employees,” the statement reads. “The school district shall vigorously defend itself and its employees in this litigation.”

Vega is not the only former East Irondequoit employee in trouble for alleged misconduct with students. A former teacher's aide, Jennifer Kennard, was convicted in a second trial this summer of raping a boy with disabilities several times over four years.

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Former school bus driver Renaldo Vega

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STATEMENT FROM EAST IRONDEQUOIT CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

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