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La. deaf school sued over molestation case

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The mother of a former Louisiana School for the Deaf student is suing the state and the school, claiming that two male students repeatedly molested her daughter.

The mother contends the state, through the Department of Education, and the school had a duty to protect her daughter from "harmful events" but were negligent in failing to do so. In a lawsuit filed Friday, the mother claims her daughter has suffered "serious and disabling injuries" from the molestations during the 2007-08 school year.

State Education Superintendent Paul Pastorek closed the school Oct. 7 after the latest in a string of sexual incidents. It reopened Wednesday.

"I believe we have done as much as we can in this short time-frame, and that the measures we have put in place raise the safety level of the school to that of an ordinary school campus, therefore allowing us to reopen LSD," Pastorek said in a statement. "We will continue to implement improvements in the area of safety and the overall educational program at LSD."

Pastorek said the mother told the school of the alleged abuse and that the girl's accusations were known to state education officials when the school was closed.

"She felt like the school did not respond to it," Pastorek said Monday.

It was the latest accusation of abuse at the school. Previously, a 16-year-old male student was accused of assaulting a preteen girl on a school bus. The boy's chaperone was later fired because she failed to follow orders to supervise the boy, who is mentally impaired and had a history of bad behavior.

Five people were arrested between November and April on sex charges involving students at the school. Three are current or former teachers. A former teacher pleaded guilty in September to contributing to the delinquency of a juvenile. He admitted exchanging sexually explicit e-mails and photographs with the same student.

The mother, who lives in Vermillion Parish, is seeking an unspecified amount in damages. The lawsuit filed in Baton Rouge has been assigned to state District Judge Tim Kelley.

Pastorek said he did not know if the girl ever alerted the school.

"We have not been able to corroborate the story," he said. "In other words, I can't say whether it happened or didn't happen."

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The mother's attorney, J. Louis Gibbens III of Lafayette, said the girl's mother found out about the alleged abuse this summer after the school year had ended.

"I've looked at the medical records and I feel very strongly about it," he said.

The girl, now 18, is attending a school in the Lafayette area, Gibbens said. The Associated Press does not usually identify people alleging sexual assault.

Information from: The Advocate, <http://www.theadvocate.com>

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