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Family of student wins \$3 million in abuse case

Former teacher given probation at 2006 trial

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A federal judge has awarded \$3 million to the family of a student who was sexually abused by a former middle school teacher.

U.S. District Judge Karon Bowdre entered the order against Charles Andrews, 55, who taught at Hueytown's Pittman Middle School. Andrews surrendered his teaching license March 1, 2006, after he pleaded guilty in Bessemer's Jefferson County Circuit Court in February 2006 to second-degree sexual abuse. He was sentenced to two years' probation.

The \$3 million judgment, which was announced Friday, resulted from a lawsuit filed against Andrews by the student's parents seeking compensation for the pain and suffering endured by the eighth-grader in late 2004 and early 2005. The lawsuit claimed the Jefferson County Board of Education and the school's principal ignored the student's allegations. Both the board and principal, however, were dismissed from the suit.

The judgment was in default because Andrews acknowledged being served with the lawsuit, but didn't respond to it. Efforts to reach Andrews were unsuccessful.

Tommy James, the plaintiff's lawyer, said the judgment - \$2.5 million in punitive and \$500,000 in compensatory damages - sends a message that such conduct will not be tolerated.

"When parents send their children to school, they should not have to worry that they are being preyed upon by teachers who are sexual predators," James said. "Sadly, this is now a widespread problem in American schools and my client is hopeful that this judgment will bring awareness to this issue and help prevent this from happening again to another student."

The lawsuit contended the girl, who was 14 at the time, was kissed and fondled by Andrews, a computer lab teacher and bus driver who had been with the county school system since 1989. James said Andrews was also a minister at the time of the incident.

James said all avenues will be explored to recover the money, including checking to see if Andrews has any insurance coverage. He said he will also place liens against any property Andrews owns and garnishee any wages.

"We're going to proceed to collect whatever we can against him," James said.

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