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Lawsuit Accuses Connecticut Rabbi of Sexual Abuse

Suit alleges that principal of Yeshiva of New Haven repeatedly abused male student

By Joseph De Avila
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Rabbi Daniel Greer speaking at the Yeshiva of New Haven in 2007. Photo: Mara Lavitt/Associated Press

A prominent Orthodox Jewish rabbi from New Haven, Conn., was accused in a federal lawsuit filed Tuesday of sexually abusing a former student.

The civil lawsuit alleges that Rabbi Daniel Greer, principal of a high school called the Yeshiva of New Haven, repeatedly abused a male student beginning in the fall of 2002, when the plaintiff was 15 years old and a sophomore. The plaintiff alleges that the abuse continued through his senior year.

William Ward, an attorney for Rabbi Greer, said he hadn't reviewed the complaint and couldn't comment on specific allegations.

"It only takes a moment to make allegations with despicable indifference to the consequences of the damages they would cause my client, his family and his reputation that he spent a lifetime building within his community," he said.

"This is a difficult time for my client and his family," Mr. Ward continued, "but I would remind the public to ask for evidence before rushing to judgment, as my client is now burdened with the task of proving that something did not happen 14 years ago."

Rabbi Greer, 75 years old, also runs an elementary school in New Haven called the Gan School. He and his family drew national attention in the 1990s, when they were involved in a legal fight over coed dorms at Yale University, which his daughter attended.

Known as the “Yale Five” case, it began when Orthodox Jewish students sought exemptions from Yale’s policy requiring them to live on campus in coed dorms. They sued, claiming the policy was discriminatory, but ultimately lost the case.

Eliyahu Mirlis, who is now 28 and lives in New Jersey, filed the abuse lawsuit in U.S. District Court in Connecticut. He attended the yeshiva from 2001 to 2005.

The lawsuit alleges that Rabbi Greer raped, sodomized and sexually assaulted Mr. Mirlis on school property, at the rabbi’s home, at motels in Connecticut and Pennsylvania, and at rental properties owned by the schools.

The statute of limitations for childhood sexual abuse in Connecticut expires 30 years after the victim turns 18, except for Class A felonies. There is no statute of limitations for Class A felonies involving child sexual abuse.

New Haven Police Chief Dean Esserman said on Tuesday that the department would speak to Mr. Mirlis’s attorney about the allegations.

Antonio Ponvert, Mr. Mirlis’s attorney, said his client hasn’t decided whether he would pursue criminal charges against Mr. Greer, but is considering it.

Mr. Ward, Rabbi Greer’s attorney, questioned why Mr. Mirlis waited 14 years before making the allegations and why he chose to file a lawsuit seeking an unspecified monetary amount.

Mr. Ponvert said it is common for victims of childhood sexual abuse to come forward years after the abuse takes place.