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NEWS

## Connecticut Jury Awards \$6.8 Million Verdict to Sex-Abuse Victim

*"Stiegler owed the minor Natasha a duty of care, he breached that duty by constantly and repeatedly sexually abusing, assaulting and exploiting her over a period of years, and Natasha suffered severe and permanent injuries and damages as a result," read the complaint.*

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**Cedra Mayfield**

## What You Need to Know

- Federal jury awards plaintiff a \$6.8 million verdict plus punitive damages to be decided by judge in sex abuse case.
- New York woman's stepfather accused of more than 100 instances of sexual abuse, exploitation and assault against plaintiff during her childhood.
- Jury finds in favor of plaintiff's claims of defendant's negligence and negligent and intentional inflictions of emotional distress.
- Defense counsel plans to appeal case to U.S. Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit.

Following a six-day trial in the U.S. District Court for the District of Connecticut, a trio of Bridgeport litigators have achieved a \$6.8 million jury verdict for a New York woman sexually abused by her stepfather as a child.

Plaintiffs attorney Antonio Ponvert III of Koskoff Koskoff & Bieder in Bridgeport credits juror education during voir dire, his client's testimony and the use of qualified post-traumatic stress disorder experts for helping secure the multimillion-dollar damages award on behalf of Natasha Mindling.

But the case might not be over yet.

New Haven attorneys Steven J. Errante and Rosalie D. Louis of Lynch, Traub, Keefe & Errante representing defendant George R Stiegler, Jr. said his client intends to appeal the verdict.

## **‘More Than 100 Times’**

Before U.S. District Court for the District of Connecticut Judge Alvin W. Thompson and a masked jury spaced out in the public gallery, Ponvert said he made it a point to maintain eye contact with jurors while arguing the plaintiff’s case.



*Attorney Antonio Ponvert III of the Bridgeport-based Koskoff Koskoff & Bieder.*

With his back to the judge in the reversed federal courtroom, Ponvert argued that up until the age of 11, Mindling’s stepfather Stiegler had “repeatedly and constantly sexually abused, exploited and assaulted” her, according to the complaint.

“Stiegler sexually abused, exploited and assaulted the plaintiff more than a hundred times over a period of years,” the complaint read. “The

constant and repeated acts of pedophilia, incest and abuse inflicted by Stiegler on his very young step-daughter during her formative and vulnerable childhood years created in her mind a hyper-sexual and falsely romantic relationship between them, and fundamentally and permanently damaged the plaintiff's self-image and her physical, emotional, psychological and sexual health and stability."

Filed by Mindling at the age of 21 in November 2018, the complaint alleged Stiegler sexually abused his step-daughter "most often at the home in Westport, Connecticut shared by Stiegler, the plaintiff's mother Ariane, and the plaintiff," but also "at a rented house in Florida and on the plaintiff's grandfather's boat."

Plaintiff counsel outlined five claims for relief including negligence, recklessness, negligent and intentional inflictions of emotional distress and sexual assault and battery. But Ponvert pointed out Friday that on its face, the case posed challenges that might have turned away other litigators.

"Here, there was no forced penetration. There was no use of weapons. There was no overt physical violence," Ponvert said. "What there was was insidious, manufacturing, and grooming of this relationship that caused immense damage because it happened over time, and it happened by this child's stepfather."