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## SJ-O faces civil lawsuit related to ex-employee

Wed, 05/30/2012 - 7:00am | Mary Schenk



ST. JOSEPH — The St. Joseph-Ogden High School Board of Education on Tuesday got briefed on a lawsuit filed earlier this month against the district and three administrators in connection with a former high school employee accused of sexually abusing female students over a period of years.

Urbana attorney Tom Bruno filed the lawsuit in Champaign County Circuit Court on May 3 against that teacher, Jon Jamison.

Also named as defendants are the district's board of education; Superintendent James Acklin; former St. Joseph-Ogden High School Principal Chad Uphoff; and current Principal Brian Brooks.

Jamison, 33, of Fairmount, was criminally charged in Champaign County in February with two counts of criminal sexual assault alleging that he had sex with two female students at the high school in 2003 and 2006. He's scheduled to be back in court on June 12.

The 19-year-old woman who filed the civil lawsuit as a Jane Doe was not one of the victims named in the criminal case. However, she alleged misconduct against her by Jamison between 2007 and 2010 while she was a student at St. Joseph-Ogden High School.

Bruno said he was informed by the state's attorney's office that the things his client said Jamison did with her amounted to misdemeanor violations and would have been beyond the statute of limitations to file criminal charges.

The 19-count lawsuit accuses:

— Jamison of battery and hate crime.

— The district, Uphoff, Brooks and Acklin of the infliction of emotional distress on the woman.

— The district of negligence in hiring, supervising and retaining Jamison.

— The district and the administrators of negligence in failing to make mandated reports to the Department of Children and Family Services of Jamison's alleged misconduct.

— The district and the administrators of willful and wanton indifference to known sexual harassment by Jamison to female students.

— The district for placing the woman in a "position of danger" by retaining Jamison as a high school employee.

Bruno said the allegations in the lawsuit came from his interviews with his client, who was 14 or 15 when the abuse by Jamison began.

Jamison, a 1996 graduate of the high school, was hired in 2001 and served in a variety of positions including girls' basketball, track and cross-country coach, bus driver and special education teacher until he resigned three days after the criminal charges were filed.

Although Bruno represents only one woman, in the suit he refers to six other minor female students who suffered sexual harassment or abuse by Jamison.

Bruno said he interviewed his client and obtained, through the Freedom of Information Act, correspondence from the school district about Jamison.

"We asked for the kitchen sink," he said of what he requested. "There are notes and other reliable indicia that these things took place."

"They had numerous red flags and failed to act appropriately," Bruno said. "The proof of the numerous red flags is that they were hauling students in, questioning them, questioning their employee, telling him how to behave. They knew something was going on but never reported it and never communicated with the parents of any of these kids to say 'We called your daughter in and asked if she had an inappropriate relationship with a teacher.'"

Acklin said the allegations in the 41-page suit were "hard to read" but declined to elaborate further until he meets with the attorney for the district's insurance company.

In previous interviews, he adamantly denied that the conduct complained of would have triggered the mandated reporting to DCFS.

"The irony is they were doing this as the Jon White story was in the news," said Bruno, referring to a former Urbana grade school teacher charged in early 2007 with molesting young female students.

Three Urbana school district administrators were ultimately found guilty of criminal charges that they failed to report suspicions of sex abuse by White to DCFS. White is serving a lengthy prison sentence.

Bruno represented victims of White in civil litigation that followed his criminal case.

Among the specific allegations in this suit were that Jamison hugged, kissed, held hands and suggestively touched female students, sent them electronic messages, asked teen girls to be friends with him on Myspace, to dance provocatively for him, provided them with alcohol and drank alcohol with them.

The activity allegedly happened both on and off school property, the suit alleged.