

Seattle Public Schools to pay \$16M to settle sex abuse lawsuit

Oct. 31, 2024 at 3:50 pm



(Nick Wagner / The Seattle Times)More

By

[Claire Bryan](#)

Seattle Times staff reporter

Seattle Public Schools will pay a record \$16 million to settle a lawsuit filed by a former Garfield High School student who alleges district employees failed to prevent [two coaches from sexually and emotionally abusing her for years](#).

The lawsuit against the district claimed one coach, Walter Jones, repeatedly raped the student while she was a young teenager and that a second coach, Marvin Hall, sexually exploited the student from the time she was 17 until after her 21st birthday. The two coaches face separate criminal charges.

The complaint alleged the district was negligent for allowing Jones to volunteer on campus, though he was barred from working anywhere in the

district, and for failing to report and prevent sexual abuse and discrimination based on a disability.

“We appreciate the Seattle School District’s recognition of the magnitude of our client’s harm,” said Paul Sewell, one of the attorneys representing the former student.

Before the sexual abuse allegedly started, the former student was identified by the district as particularly vulnerable and suffering from an emotional disability. The complaint defined emotional disability as “a broad term used in the field of special education to describe a range of mental health issues, including emotional instability, behavioral challenges, social difficulties, and academic struggles.” She had an individualized education plan to provide her academic and social support in school, according to the complaint.

The former student was tapped to practice with the Garfield High School team at 13 years old after she was recognized for her basketball talent, according to the complaint. She would work out with Jones, a volunteer weightlifting coach, who had been marked by the district as “do not rehire” after he was fired from Ballard High School, the complaint said.

The lawsuit claimed Jones repeatedly raped the former student over the course of two years, starting in 2013 when she was 13 years old. At times, he allegedly threatened to kill her and her family if she reported the abuse.

Jones is charged with two counts of felony child rape in King County Superior Court.

According to a Seattle Police Department investigation cited in the lawsuit, other SPS employees found some of Jones’ behavior inappropriate but didn’t know about the sexual assaults. The district’s athletic director also knew Jones was working as a coach despite not being approved to do so, the complaint stated.

The lawsuit claimed Hall, another coach, entered an abusive relationship with the former student and sexually exploited her from when she was 17 until after her 21st birthday. Hall was the assistant coach of Garfield’s boys basketball team when he met the former student and later assisted

Garfield's girls team, the lawsuit said. Hall was married with six children at the time, according to the lawsuit.

Their relationship continued after the former student graduated and attended colleges out of state. Hall sent her text messages, visited her and flew her back to Seattle as part of what the plaintiff's attorneys argue was part of his ongoing manipulation and sexual exploitation.

Hall faces a criminal charge of sexual misconduct with a minor in King County Superior Court.

The district will pay \$500,000 in defense costs and settlement fees in the civil case. The Washington Schools Risk Management Pool, the district's insurer, will pay the remainder of the \$16 million settlement.

The settlement is the largest in the district's history, a district spokesperson confirmed.

Neither coach is allowed to volunteer or work for the district, the spokesperson said in a statement. "SPS remains committed to its preventative trainings and to strengthening its procedures to prevent incidents like this from occurring in the future," the statement read.

"While she is relieved by the outcome, our client will never reclaim her childhood," said Sewell, the attorney. "She hopes that the settlement will spark meaningful change so that no other child will ever have to suffer the same pain and trauma."

The attorney representing Jones declined to comment on the settlement. Hall's attorney did not respond to a request for comment Thursday.

Claire Bryan: 206-464-8946 or cbryan@seattletimes.com. Claire Bryan covers education issues for The Seattle Times.

Most Read Stories