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THE TRIAL VERDICTS AND APPELLATE REVERSALS THAT CHANGED THE CALIFORNIA LEGAL LANDSCAPE IN 2025

Jane Doe et al. v. Mountain View School District



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The abuse was horrific and it went on for years. But administrators ignored the molestation of students committed by Joseph Baldenebro, a teacher at Miramonte Elementary School. Instead of calling police, they filed away memos and let the crimes go on. Finally, a school official blew the whistle.

"I saw glimpses early on how bad it was, from police reports," said

Michael S. Carrillo of Carrillo Law Firm, who came to represent six victims. He filed the case in 2018 — and despite a \$48 million jury verdict at a 2025 trial, his clients are still waiting to get their compensation because the school district put up a large bond to take an appeal.

The police reports didn't tell the whole story. The secret memos detailed repulsive conduct by the tea-

cher, and shameful inactivity by his superiors. "Layer by layer it came clear," Carrillo said. "The abuse, the length of time it went on, the blind eye from the administrators."

The school district's lawyers from Lewis Brisbois Bisgaard & Smith LLP downplayed the trauma. "They acted like there was nothing there," Carrillo said. Attorneys Dana Alden Fox and Edward E. Ward, Jr. made lowball

settlement offers. Now, Carrillo said he's glad they did. "I'm thankful they offered peanuts because this had to come out in the open at a trial and be seen by the community."

Ward did not respond to an email seeking comment. Fox could not be reached for comment.

When Carrillo brought the case to trial, he added Nicholas C. Rowley, Courtney E. Rowley, John A. Kawai and Keith Bruno of Trial Lawyers for Justice to the team. The team showed jurors evidence that Baldenebro was allowed to kiss children on the mouth, hold them in his lap and drive them away from school because he told an administrator they were his god-children.

The six children, who were fourth and fifth graders at the time of the abuse, endured years of mistreatment.

It was a difficult trial. A week in, Carrillo, Rowley and the other plain-

Case Details	
CASE NAME	Jane Doe et al. v. Mountain View School District
TYPE OF CASE	Child sexual molestation
COURT	Los Angeles Superior
JUDGE(S)	Mary Ann Murphy
PLANTIFF LAWYERS	Carrillo Law Firm, Michael S. Carrillo, Laura M. Jimenez, Luis A. Carrillo; Trial Lawyers for Justice, Nicholas C. Rowley, Courtney E. Rowley, John A. Kawai, Keith J. Bruno
DEFENSE LAWYERS	Lewis Brisbois Bisgaard & Smith LLP, Dana Alden Fox, Edward E. Ward Jr.

tiff lawyers moved to disqualify Los Angeles County Superior Court Judge Mary Ann Murphy. Fourteen other attorneys filed declarations in support of disqualification, asserting that Murphy displayed a pattern of hostile, biased and unprofessional behavior, racism and favoritism toward the defense.

Murphy denied the request. The trial went forward. "That was a tough position for us on the plaintiff side," Carrillo said. "But we got past it." *Jane Doe v. Mountain View School District*, BC71-2514 (L.A. Super. Ct., filed July 2, 2018).

Delay plagued the case. In 2021, when the defense announced it

planned to introduce evidence of a subsequent sexual assault on the lead plaintiff in an effort to diminish the trauma she suffered from the defendant, the state Supreme Court declined to disallow it, saying the law as it stood allowed the information to be used as mitigating evidence.

So, Carrillo and colleagues took their case to the Legislature, which passed what became known as "Suzie's Law," which barred the evidence.

"It's been a long battle," Carrillo said. "But if you meet these kids, you'll see it's worth the fight we put in."