

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Special Needs Student Sexually Abused at Dos Pueblos High School; Family Sues Santa Barbara Unified

The Veen Firm files suit on behalf of a teenage student, alleging the district failed to protect children most vulnerable to abuse. Two former Dos Pueblos employees were arrested by Sheriff's deputies on sexual misconduct allegations in the same week last May. Sheriff's detectives continue to seek additional survivors and witnesses.

SANTA BARBARA, Calif. — A teenage student at Dos Pueblos High School in Goleta was sexually abused at school by people the Santa Barbara Unified School District paid to care for him, according to a civil complaint filed last week in Santa Barbara Superior Court.

The lawsuit, filed by The Veen Firm LLP, alleges that three former Dos Pueblos special education employees, Andrew Grimes, Andrew Mitchell, and Miguel "Michael" Angel Juarez, abused the student while he was in their care, including while being assisted with toileting and hygiene in restroom facilities and other secluded areas of the campus. The complaint asserts eight causes of action, including sexual battery, negligent hiring and supervision, invasion of privacy, and intentional infliction of emotional distress.

The student is not named in court filings. Because he is a minor, he is identified only as John Doe. His mother appears as Jane Doe, Guardian ad Litem. He remains a student in the Santa Barbara Unified School District.

"These children are the most vulnerable students in any school in California," said Steven A. Kronenberg, the lead attorney representing the plaintiff. "They are placed in private rooms with adults who are supposed to help them, and they cannot fully describe what happens to them when something goes wrong. That is exactly what predators look for. The Santa Barbara Unified School District knew, or should have known, that the system it set up was creating those conditions. It did not act."

A pattern at one school

The civil case follows a series of public arrests at Dos Pueblos High School. On May 8, 2025, the Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Office arrested defendant Juarez at his Lompoc home on suspicion of misdemeanor sexual battery in a separate incident involving an adult woman he had met through his employment at the school. The Sheriff's Office issued a press release that day asking the public for information about additional survivors. The next day, May 9, 2025, Sheriff's detectives arrested Shaun Donald Hertlein, 42, a then-assistant freshman football coach at Dos Pueblos High School and a youth pastor at SouthCoast Church in Goleta, on a warrant for multiple felonies including possession of child sexual abuse material. Hertlein pleaded guilty in October 2025 to felony possession of more than six hundred such images, was sentenced to two years in state prison, and is now a registered sex offender for life.

Following Hertlein's arrest, the district told families that "all school district employees go through a thorough background check." The Doe family's complaint, filed last week, alleges that this same district failed to adequately screen, supervise, or monitor the staff named as defendants in

this matter — staff who, according to the complaint, had unsupervised access to a special needs minor during toileting and hygiene assistance at the same school during the same period.

“Two former employees of the same school arrested for sex crimes in the same week is not a coincidence. It is a system that was not paying attention,” Kronenberg said. “If your child has been at Dos Pueblos, especially in special education, and something has felt wrong, please call the Sheriff, please call STESA. You will be heard.”

Witnesses and additional survivors sought

The Santa Barbara County Sheriff’s Office continues to publicly request that anyone with information about defendant Juarez or related incidents contact detectives. The Sheriff’s Office can be reached at (805) 681-4150 (Detective Kiesow) or anonymously at (805) 681-4171. This call for survivors is the Sheriff’s, not ours; we echo it because we believe additional families may have information that could help both the criminal investigation and this civil case.

Parents whose special needs children attended Dos Pueblos High School during the 2024 to 2025 school year and who have observed unexplained behavioral changes are encouraged to speak first with a victim advocate. Standing Together to End Sexual Assault (STESA), the rape crisis center for Santa Barbara County and the Sheriff’s named community partner for this investigation, is available 24 hours a day at (805) 564-3696. Free, confidential, in English and Spanish.

Witnesses and former staff with information directly relevant to this civil matter may also contact The Veen Firm confidentially. The case microsite, which includes the file-stamped complaint, public records, advocate referrals, and a confidential intake form for those who wish to speak with civil counsel, is available at veenfirm.com/sexual-assault

What the lawsuit alleges

The complaint alleges the District and its Board of Education failed to conduct proper due diligence before hiring and retaining the named defendants, failed to adequately supervise or monitor them, and failed to implement and enforce policies to detect and prevent the sexual abuse of vulnerable students. It also alleges that personnel entrusted with the care of special needs students posed a foreseeable risk of harm and that warning signs were ignored.

Children with developmental disabilities are at least four times more likely to be sexually abused than children without disabilities, according to Disability Rights California, the federally-designated protection and advocacy agency for people with disabilities in the state. Cases are often difficult to prosecute because survivors may have limited ability to describe what happened to them.

The Veen Firm complied with the California Government Tort Claims Act, presenting a claim to the District on October 22, 2025, amending it on November 13, 2025, and receiving a rejection on November 19, 2025. The civil action was filed within the deadline set by Government Code section 945.6.

Resources for survivors, witnesses, and families

Standing Together to End Sexual Assault (STESA): 24-hour hotline at (805) 564-3696. Free, confidential counseling and advocacy in English and Spanish.

Santa Barbara County Sheriff’s Office: Detective Kiesow at (805) 681-4150; anonymous tip line (805) 681-4171.

District Attorney Victim-Witness Assistance Program: (805) 568-2400 or toll free (855) 840-3232.

National Sexual Assault Hotline (RAINN): 1-800-656-4673.

Case microsite: veenfirm.com/sexual-assault

About The Veen Firm LLP

Founded in 1975, The Veen Firm LLP is a San Francisco-based trial firm representing plaintiffs in catastrophic injury, wrongful death, and complex civil cases throughout California. The firm has recovered more than one billion dollars on behalf of injury victims.

A copy of the complaint, additional background, and a confidential contact form for survivors, witnesses, and others with information are available at the case microsite. Members of the press may also email info@veenfirm.com or call the press line at **(510) 560-6731** for a file-stamped copy of the complaint and to arrange interviews.

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Notes to Editors

- 1.** The plaintiff and his mother are not named in court filings to protect their privacy as a minor and his Guardian ad Litem. Please refrain from publishing identifying details if known.
- 2.** The criminal arrest of defendant Juarez on May 8, 2025, by the Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Office concerned a separate alleged incident involving an adult victim. The civil case filed by The Veen Firm concerns alleged abuse of a minor at school. Both matters involve the same defendant.
- 3.** Context on the second 2025 arrest at Dos Pueblos High School. On May 9, 2025 — one day after the arrest of defendant Juarez — Santa Barbara County Sheriff's detectives arrested Shaun Donald Hertlein, then 42, who served as a walk-on assistant freshman football coach at Dos Pueblos High School in 2024 and as a youth pastor at SouthCoast Church in Goleta. Hertlein pleaded guilty in October 2025 to felony possession of more than six hundred images of child sexual abuse material and was sentenced to two years in state prison; he is now a registered sex offender for life. Public coverage of the arrest and plea is available at Noozhawk (noozhawk.com/da-charges-goleta-pastor-high-school-assistant-coach-with-possession-of-child-porn) and the Santa Barbara Independent (independent.com/2025/10/24/former-goleta-youth-pastor-and-high-school-coach-pleads-guilty-to-child-pornography-charges). Hertlein is not a defendant in this lawsuit. He is referenced here because the plaintiff's complaint pleads negligent hiring, supervision, and retention by the same school district during the same period, and because the district's public statements about staff vetting following his arrest are relevant to that claim.
- 4.** Attorneys Steven A. Kronenberg and Anthony L. Label are the firm's spokespersons for this matter and are responsible for this press release. They are available for interviews. Please coordinate scheduling through the press line at (510) 560-6731 or by emailing info@veenfirm.com.
- 5.** The plaintiff and his family will not be available for press. The mother is a private citizen who has asked for privacy. Please do not approach the family or attempt to identify the plaintiff. Reporters seeking outside policy or disability-abuse context may contact Standing Together to

End Sexual Assault (STESA) at (805) 564-3696 or Disability Rights California at communications@disabilityrightsca.org.

6. Allegations contained in the complaint are not findings of fact. Defendants are entitled to the presumption that the claims must be proved in court.

7. The call for additional survivors and witnesses in this release echoes the Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Office's public request of May 8, 2025. The Veen Firm directs the public to law enforcement and victim advocates first; a confidential intake channel for civil-case witnesses and affected families is also offered at the case microsite.

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