

\$37.5M sexual assault suit filed against Fellowship Bible Church



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(Photo: File)

A local family has filed a \$37.5 million lawsuit against a Brentwood church after their 3-year-old was sexually assaulted by a church volunteer.

According to a lawsuit filed Monday, the family's 3-year-old son was raped by a male teenage volunteer in a bathroom of Fellowship Bible Church of Williamson County during church on Aug. 24, 2014. The teenager pleaded guilty to aggravated sexual battery.

The family left their son at the Children's Ministry while worshipping, but they weren't aware of the sexual assault until the following weekend.

According to the lawsuit, the church allegedly urged the family to not pursue charges and asked them to attend another church campus.

It further states that the church "sought to hide the truth about the perpetrator pedophile and about the rape of (the 3-year-old) from other families."

The family, who had been members of the church for 12 years, is suing Fellowship Bible Church for the negligent failure to provide a safe environment for a child.

The lawsuit alleges the church failed to ensure adequate screening and supervision for its staff and volunteers and did not install adequate security measures in its classrooms.

According to the lawsuit, the family is seeking compensatory damages of \$37.5 million. The family is seeking \$22.5 million for the victim, as well as \$5 million each for the husband, wife and their daughter, who also attended church with the family on Aug. 24, 2014.

"To me, it's incredibly important that every church and every child care facility has a wake-up call, and this should be it now. No one should think it can't happen to them or happen to someone in their community," said Kathryn Barnett, managing partner of Morgan & Morgan's Nashville office. "Before going to any church or child care facility, I would advise families to ask what the screening process is, what kind of training does the staff have and what is the source of the training. You want to make sure all those steps are being taken."

Fellowship Bible Church declined to comment.

Founded in 2003, Fellowship Bible Church of Williamson County is a nondenominational church at 1210 Franklin Road in Brentwood. The church has additional locations in Franklin and Nashville.

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