

## Former Putnam Valley teacher's lawyer says ex-student 'fabricated' story of sexual assault

The lawyer for a former Putnam Valley Middle School teacher accused of drugging and sexually assaulting a 12-year-old seventh-grader in a classroom flatly denied Monday that his client had done anything of the kind. He charged that Laura Bliss, now 23, was making up the accusations against Dennis Tave, 65, who was forced into retirement by the allegations.

"It just plain didn't happen," Stephen Santoro said during Monday's opening of Bliss' federal civil rights suit in White Plains. "Listen to the story and I am certain that the story will tell you it was fabricated."

Santoro said Bliss had told another student of being drugged by a boy at a party and not knowing what was done to her before making the allegations against Tave in 2003. Bliss charges in her lawsuit that Tave attacked her in early 2001 when she went to his class after school to make up work.

No criminal charges were ever filed against Tave, who was investigated by the Putnam County Sheriff's Department after Bliss and

She had told a therapist about the alleged incident just prior to filing the complaint with police.

Bliss' lawyer, Carolyn Minter, told the jury of five men and one woman that Tave assaulted Bliss and continued to make sexual advances on her after the 2001 incident, including having a "checklist" where he would pull her clothes to see what color underwear she had on. She said school officials found out from other students that Tave made them feel uneasy, as well.

"A lot of the students that were interviewed admitted that Mr. Tave made them feel uncomfortable," she said.

The lawsuit accuses the Putnam Valley school district of failing to properly supervise Tave and knowing about a propensity to victimize students.

The district and middle school principal Edward Hallisey are defendants in the \$17 million suit, as well as Tave.

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The lawyer for the school district, Dennis O'Connor, said that once the district was informed in June 2003 of the allegations, it removed Tave from the school.

"He was told not to report to school, and he has not been back to school since," O'Connor said. Tave resigned that August.

But O'Connor said another student did complain of an incident in which Tave grabbed her around the waist and that it made her "uncomfortable." That incident occurred in April 2001, he said, two or three months after the alleged attack on Bliss.

The district had no indication at the time of the alleged attack on Bliss that Tave had any predatory inclinations, O'Connor said.

"The proof will show there is nothing in his record that would show he would commit such a horrendous act as this young lady claims," he said.

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