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Putnam D.A.: Principal was 'misleading,' but perjury evidence lacking

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PUTNAM VALLEY - Middle school Principal Edward Hallisey was "misleading" and "evasive" in an affidavit regarding the alleged rape of a 12-year-old student, but there is not enough evidence to support a perjury charge, Putnam County District Attorney Adam B. Levy says.

The district attorney opened an investigation into the matter after the state Commission of Investigation released a report harshly criticizing how school officials, police and the District Attorney's Office handled the case.

In a statement released late yesterday afternoon, the district attorney said his office had reviewed hundreds of pages of transcripts and worked closely with the Commission of Investigation and the state Education Department, which also conducted a review of the allegations, before reaching the decision to close the case.

The case involves allegations that former social studies teacher Dennis Tave drugged and sexually assaulted student Laura Bliss in February 2001, when she was in the seventh grade. The sexual advances are alleged to have continued, the Bliss family contends, until 2003, when their daughter came forward.

In its report from April of this year, the Commission of Investigation said: "The Commission concludes that Mr. Hallisey's affidavit was misleading to the extent that it attempted to convince the Court that the Teacher's reputation was beyond reproach and that there had been no negative reports made against him. Mr. Hallisey omitted significant evidence of the Teacher's inappropriate conduct at the time he signed the affidavit."

One example of the teacher's "inappropriate conduct" was an allegation that he wrapped himself around a 12-year-old student in the gymnasium, pulling her close to his body. Another was that he told a 13-year-old student she was ready to "make out" and would have to do so with all the boys in the class, according to the commission report.

When the commission confronted Hallisey about his statements, saying he was aware that these two incidents had been reported before the Bliss allegations, he acknowledged the affidavit was "inaccurate," according to testimony in the commission report.

"We agree with the New York State Commission's conclusion that Mr. Hallisey's Affidavit was 'misleading' and 'evasive,'" Levy said in a written statement. "However, after reviewing all the evidence, we found insufficient proof to support a perjury charge."

Levy is the former law partner of Stephen Santoro, the attorney representing Tave, the Bliss family said. Kevin Wright was the Putnam district attorney at the time Bliss' rape complaint was first investigated.

Hallisey could not be reached late yesterday afternoon for comment. The commission report said that he and Tave were close friends, and that Hallisey demonstrated no desire to conduct an unbiased investigation of the rape allegation.

Peter Bliss, who has been actively pushing for a review of his daughter's case, said he was unaware of the district attorney's latest investigation.

"This is surprising news to us," he said yesterday, when told of it by a reporter. "We have no knowledge of it. What else is new?"

In addition to a federal lawsuit seeking at least \$17 million in damages from the teacher and the Putnam Valley school district, the family also has a petition to Gov. David A. Paterson requesting that he assign a special prosecutor to the case or take whatever other action may be necessary to start legal proceedings, even though the statute of limitations expired May 20.

Peter Bliss said he could not comment on the status of the talks with the Governor's Office, adding that he also has other processes in motion.

"We will continue to pursue and hold every individual and agency accountable for their actions regarding our daughter," he said.

Tave, a Mahopac resident who is now retired and whose teaching license was suspended pending his seeking psychological counseling, has denied sexually assaulting Bliss. Santoro, his lawyer, could not be reached yesterday evening for comment.
