

Southwestern Seminary denies liability in sex abuse lawsuit

August 9, 2019

SHERMAN, Texas (BP)—Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary says it is not liable for any monetary damages to a former student who claims in [a lawsuit](#) she was raped on campus at gunpoint by a student the seminary employed.

Southwestern Seminary filed legal documents Aug. 7 answering the lawsuit by plaintiff “Jane Roe,” according to the Eastern District of Texas federal court in Sherman.

The plaintiff, who no longer attends the seminary, claims she was stalked and forcibly raped at gunpoint on at least three occasions from October 2014 through April 2015 by a fellow student identified as “John Doe” whom Roe said was employed by the seminary as a plumber.

Roe asserts neither the seminary nor its president at the time, Paige Patterson, sought to protect her when she reported her abuse. Instead, her suit claims, Patterson intimidated and disparaged her. Patterson also is named as a defendant in the case.

Her lawsuit asserts Southwestern Seminary had no system in place to prevent and address the sexual assault of students.

Seminary responds

“Plaintiffs damages, if any, were proximately caused by unforeseeable, independent intervening, or superseding events beyond the control, and unrelated to the conduct of SWBTS,” the seminary’s response reads.

“SWBTS’s actions and omissions, if any, were superseded by such unforeseeable, independent, intervening and superseding events, and as such SWBTS is not liable.”

Southwestern Seminary lists 26 affirmative defenses to the lawsuit, including that the plaintiff’s claim for punitive damages violates the Fourth, Fifth, Sixth, Seventh, Eighth and 14th Amendments of the U.S. Constitution, as well as sections 3, 9, 13 and 19 of Article 1 of the Texas Constitution.

The seminary also denies numerous allegations of the lawsuit, refuting the plaintiff’s claim that the seminary had a duty to protect Roe and similarly situated students from “the risk of dating and domestic violence, sexual abuse and/or sexual assault, such as the duty to properly warn, train or educate Roe and other students about how to avoid such a risk.”

Southwestern Seminary, represented by the law firm of Macdonald Devin, is asking the court to dismiss the suit and to levy against the plaintiff court costs and any further relief the court might deem just and proper.

Patterson, the former seminary president whose service was terminated in May 2018, was issued a summons July 22 in the lawsuit, according to documents filed in federal court. He had not responded by Baptist Press publication time Aug. 8.

The case originally was filed March 11 under the plaintiff’s official name, but it was refiled May 22 after the court granted use of the pseudonym Jane Roe, according to court documents. The lawsuit was unsealed June 6.