



## VENTURA COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

Office of Bill Ayub, Sheriff



## OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY

COUNTY OF VENTURA, STATE OF CALIFORNIA

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District Attorney

### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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#### **Ventura County Sheriff and District Attorney's Offices Complete Joint Investigation into Sexual Abuse Allegations at The Thacher School**

In August 2020, The Thacher School Board of Trustees hired the law firm of Munger, Tolles & Olson (MTO) to investigate historical sexual abuse allegations relating to The Thacher School (Thacher) alumni. The focus of the investigation was the historical abuses suffered by students and the faculty's response to the allegations. The school sent an email out to its alumni and community members to solicit reports of abuse to MTO. Thacher falls within the law enforcement jurisdiction of the Ventura County Sheriff's Office Ojai Valley Station.

In June 2021, an attorney from MTO and a school administrator from Thacher delivered the initial notification to the Ventura County Sheriff's Office. MTO indicated this was an ongoing investigation and additional notifications would follow. Approximately one week later, MTO released an initial public report detailing many of the allegations being made against former administrators and students of Thacher.

Between July and December 2021, MTO delivered over one thousand electronic files to the Ventura County Sheriff, in several batches, which documented their administrative investigation into Thacher. These documents included reports created by MTO as well as emails and other documents generated by school employees. During this time period, detectives analyzed the raw data and organized them into individual case files.

The Sheriff's investigation identified approximately 100 criminal cases which required follow-up. These cases covered a time period beginning in the 1960s and included a few cases that became known during the 2021 school year. The Sheriff and the District Attorney agreed to investigate these cases jointly with the Sheriff's Office investigating each potential crime and following-up with each victim. The District Attorney assumed responsibility for investigating any potential crimes committed by school administrators who, upon being notified of suspected child abuse, failed to report these suspicions to law enforcement, as required by law.

Sheriff's detectives handled each case on an individual basis. The majority of these cases were past the statute of limitations for possible criminal prosecution based on an initial reading of the MTO public report by detectives and prosecutors. The Sheriff's and District Attorney's Offices endeavored to uncover facts triggering the longest statute of limitations available by conducting a thorough and

comprehensive evaluation of each and every case. Thus, detectives reached out to each victim to afford them an opportunity to discuss and/or report their abuse and to receive survivor benefits and resources to help with follow-up and recovery. A report was completed for every affected student.

Of the approximately 100 cases in total, three cases were submitted to the District Attorney's Office for filing consideration in 2022. The District Attorney's Office declined to file charges in these three cases due to the expiration of the statute of limitations. The remaining cases were not submitted to the District Attorney's Office because they fell clearly outside the statute of limitations, the victims sought no prosecution, or no crime could be established.

During the course of the investigation into historical abuses at Thacher, the District Attorney's Juvenile Unit filed a separate criminal case in juvenile court. This case related to an alleged crime that occurred on campus at Thacher but is unrelated to the historical abuse investigation and was not discussed in the MTO report.

District Attorney Investigators and prosecutors examined over 50 incidents for potential failure to report child abuse crimes. Aside from reviewing the materials provided by MTO, investigators conducted interviews with victims and school employees. Investigators and prosecutors determined that in each instance charges could not be filed. The primary reasons for this outcome were expiration of the statute of limitations, a lack of knowledge of the underlying crime by school employees, or the lack of the commission of a crime triggering mandated reporting requirements. In some instances, prosecutors determined timely reports were properly made to law enforcement.

While MTO and Thacher were cooperative in providing materials to the Sheriff's and District Attorney's Offices, the criminal investigation was hampered by a number of factors. Specifically, Thacher's decision to hire a private law firm to investigate allegations of sexual abuse and then issue a public report prior to a law enforcement notification and investigation posed difficulties for detectives and prosecutors, who routinely seek to obtain incriminating statements from suspects in the course of their sexual assault investigations. When suspects are alerted to potential crimes in a public report before law enforcement involvement, the likelihood of gathering statements from those suspects to corroborate or negate allegations becomes exceedingly difficult. Among other challenges, suspects decline to be interviewed or refer inquires to retained lawyers. In other instances, they take steps to avoid law enforcement notification and contact altogether, knowing that they have been publicly identified. These scenarios occurred in the course of the Thacher investigation.

Additionally, the passage of time made many potential crimes both difficult to investigate and outside applicable statutes of limitations. The Sheriff and District Attorney encourage schools and other institutions who become aware of historical sexual assault allegations to make a report as early as possible to law enforcement. Doing so allows law enforcement to investigate these crimes in a manner that is most conducive to holding sexual offenders accountable.

Despite the lack of charges in this case, victims of previously unreported sexual assault crimes at Thacher or elsewhere are strongly encouraged to report these crimes to law enforcement. The challenges inherent in the cases discussed here are not necessarily present in every unreported sexual assault case. In fact, the District Attorney's Office in conjunction with the Ventura County Sheriff's Office recently created a cold case sexual assault unit aimed at bringing justice to victims of unsolved sexual assault cases. Victims wishing to make a report of sexual assault may contact the law enforcement agency either where the event occurred or where the victim resides.

A sexual assault victim may receive support from the Ventura County Family Justice Center regardless of whether they wish to report a crime to law enforcement. If you or someone you know has been impacted, please contact the Ventura County Family Justice Center for assistance. The Family Justice Center is located at 3170 Loma Vista Road in Ventura. During business hours, Monday – Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., requests for services and information are available in person, by telephone (805) 652-7655, by email at [vcfjc.coop@ventura.org](mailto:vcfjc.coop@ventura.org) or by text at (805) 947-7981.

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