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Synagogue volunteer arrested on inappropriate behavior charges

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By Janis Siegel, Jewish Sound Correspondent

A volunteer for Sephardic Bikur Holim was arrested and charged on May 2 for the crime of communicating with a minor for immoral purposes, with an additional finding of probable cause for having committed child molestation, according to the findings of a Seattle Police Department investigation.”

Eli Varon, 28, volunteered at the Seward Park synagogue and was in charge of catering, cooking, and candy throwing for all of the youth through high school-aged special events and celebrations. He is alleged to have met with a 13-year-old female inside the building, where the assault reportedly took place.

The Seattle detective in charge of the investigation concluded that Varon “took advantage” of his position at SBH to have sexual contact with the 13-year-old by inviting her into the synagogue when no one was around.

SBH board president Simon Amiel told The Jewish Sound that the congregation is maintaining a neutral position on the matter but that he believes it has taken appropriate measures to ensure the safety of all concerned until the case, which has its next scheduled hearing on June 10, is decided.

“We recognize that Eli has been charged — not convicted — and is presumed innocent unless proven otherwise,” Amiel said. “Without taking any position on the charges against Eli, we wish to make it clear that the safety of the most vulnerable among us — our children and the children of our neighboring communities — is SBH’s highest priority. Regardless of how the case is resolved, this will remain our highest priority.”

As the case against Varon goes forward, Amiel said the board has appointed a “special committee” that has the sole mandate of representing SBH in the matter and also has the power to act on its behalf on any action that may be required.

The SPD stated that the purported meeting between Varon and the minor female occurred during the late evening hours between 11 p.m. and midnight on one unspecified evening in late June through July 4, 2013.

In the report, Varon told police the minor female is not an SBH member but that she is a member of the

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“The board, leadership, and staff of SBH take this situation very seriously,” said Amiel. “Both the alleged victim and Eli are in our prayers and our thoughts.”

Communication with a minor for immoral purposes can be charged as a gross misdemeanor or a felony, depending on the manner of communication and the defendant’s history of sexual offenses. Washington State law allows the court a wide range of sentencing options from one year in jail to five years in prison.

As one of the conditions for his release on \$25,000 bail, Varon was ordered by the court to have no unsupervised contact with minors or the alleged victim in the case. The court also ordered Varon to stay away from SBH.

Amiel aid the board and Varon also agreed that until the case is resolved he would not be allowed on SBH property or be able to partake in any activities or events there.

Additionally, Varon, who was a member of the SBH board, has resigned until the case is settled, at which time his status could be renegotiated.

Amiel would not comment on how long Varon has been volunteering at SBH.

When first contacted by police, Varon originally denied having any contact at SBH with the girl, either in the synagogue or later that summer by text message, as alleged by the girl’s mother.

In a subsequent interview by SPD, Varon told police that he did recall talking to her one evening inside the building and sitting with her on the steps, where the alleged incident was supposed to have taken place, but denied having any contact with her.

When asked by police to take a polygraph test, Varon first consented to taking one but then declined taking the test upon the advice of his counsel, David Marshall.

The Jewish Sound contacted Marshall for comment about the case but did not receive a response.

According to the SPD investigation, the girl’s mother, who became aware of the alleged incident some weeks after it occurred, reported it to police on Sept. 22, 2013.

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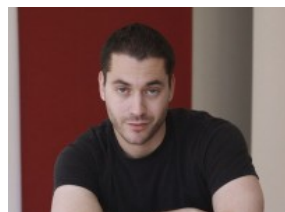
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