

A convicted sex offender flees to Israel after alleged assault in Brooklyn synagogue

By Reuven Blau (NY Daily News)

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A convicted sex offender stood to be arrested after he allegedly assaulted an 11-year-old boy in a Brooklyn synagogue last summer.

But when police went to Yona Weinberg's Flatbush home, they found he had fled to Israel.

Now, child advocates in the Jewish community are throwing up their hands, frustrated that the former bar mitzvah tutor and social worker was allowed to skip the country because prosecutors in the office of District Attorney Ken Thompson appeared to be slow to react.

"He's making all of us who really campaigned hard for him look like fools," activist Chaim Levin said of Thompson. "He seems to be playing politics. The outcome of this case is disgusting."

Weinberg, 36, allegedly slammed the 11-year-old boy against a shelf of prayer books in the synagogue on Aug. 15, witnesses told police.

Police are prepared to arrest Weinberg on a misdemeanor assault charge, records show.

But since Weinberg is only facing a misdemeanor, authorities won't be able to extradite him from Israel.

"In the event that he returns to New York, he will be charged," said Lupe Todd, Thompson's spokeswoman.

The synagogue scuffle occurred two months after the boy told cops he was "forced" to touch Weinberg's shirt and pants, ostensibly to measure their size, a law enforcement source told the Daily News.

After investigating that allegation, Thompson declined to bring forcible touching charges, concluding it was unwarranted because the boy did not touch Weinberg's privates.

The boy told police that Weinberg pushed him against the bookshelf, threatening further harm if he continued to talk to authorities.

Police didn't file an official report about the alleged incident until Sept. 9, 25 days after the alleged incident. The cause for the delay is unclear.

Police went to Weinberg's Flatbush home to arrest him a day later, but his wife said he was not home and referred him to an attorney.

The next day, Weinberg was on a plane to Israel.

Weinberg's wife and four children joined him in Israel several weeks later on a trip arranged by Nefesh B'nefesh, a organization that helps Americans move.

Back in Brooklyn, child advocates are still fuming about the situation, calling it the latest sign that Thompson, who just started his second year on the job, has not taken the steps he promised during his campaign.

"The culture in the Brooklyn DA's office is to discourage Orthodox victims of child abuse from proceeding with their complaints," said Ben Hirsch, a co-founder of advocacy organization Survivors

of Justice.

Weinberg was able to escape closer supervision because he was never sentenced to parole in 2010, when he concluded a 13-month jail sentence for sexually molesting two young boys.

But Weinberg is required, as a Level 3 sex offender, to check in with police every 90 days and verify his address once a year. Failing to do so would amount to a felony offense.

However, the state Division of Criminal Justice Services said a letter sent to verify Weinberg's Brooklyn address bounced back in December.

"We have not received any information from this offender or the NYPD," DCJS spokeswoman Janine Kava said Thursday.

Weinberg, meanwhile, has been telling his neighbors in the Jerusalem suburb of Har Nof that it's all a big mistake, said a community source who has taken steps to notify Israelis about Weinberg's history.

Thompson's office said that prosecutors moved to have Weinberg arrested as soon as they heard about the allegations. Todd also maintained that Weinberg notified police he was leaving the country and promised to check in as required. It was unclear whether he had done that.

To community advocates, that came as little solace.

"The way he has been dealing with these cases sends a message that he's not interested in prosecuting Orthodox Jewish sex offenders," Hirsch said of Thompson. "The victims and their families have gotten this message loud and clear."