

HOME / CIVIC / U.S. NEWS®

Prosecution Fines Rescinded in Mexican Church Leader Case

A Los Angeles judge has rescinded sanctions against two prosecutors who she said failed to turn over evidence in a case against a Mexican megachurch leader charged with child rape and human trafficking.

By Associated Press, Wire Service Content Sept. 20, 2019, at 5:50 p.m.



FILE - In this July 15, 2019, file photo, Naason Joaquin Garcia, the leader of a Mexico-based evangelical church with a worldwide membership, attends a bail review hearing in Los Angeles Superior Court in Los Angeles. Garcia, who is considered the church's apostle, and two co-defendants were arrested in June on suspicion of sexually abusing three girls and a woman in Los Angeles County. All three have pleaded not guilty and a fourth defendant remains at large. (Al Seib/Los Angeles Times via AP, Pool, File) THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

BY STEFANIE DAZIO, Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — A Los Angeles judge rescinded sanctions Friday against two prosecutors whom she said had failed give defense lawyers evidence in a case against a Mexican megachurch leader charged with child rape and human trafficking.

Reconsidering at the request of the [California](#) attorney general's office, Superior Court Judge Teresa Sullivan on Friday overturned \$10,000 in fines she levied a day earlier, but indicated the evidence must be provided by Monday for a hearing to determine if the case should go to trial.

Sullivan had found that prosecutors Amanda Plisner and Diana Callaghan violated a court order to provide evidence to lawyers for Naason Joaquin Garcia, leader of La Luz del Mundo, and two co-defendants. Their attorneys declined to comment Friday.

They have pleaded not guilty to allegations of sexually abusing three girls and a woman in Los Angeles County. A fourth defendant remains at large.

Plisner and Callaghan had said some of the evidence included child pornography and therefore it could not be handed over to defense attorneys — it would need to be viewed at their offices — without violating the law. The defense attorneys, however, said the evidence was only available to view in Fresno and their clients could not pay their travel costs. Plisner and Callaghan were not in court Friday.

Sullivan, visibly frustrated and pointing her finger from the bench Friday, told new prosecutors Patricia Fusco and James Root that their colleagues should have addressed the issue much sooner.

"Prosecuting agencies across the country are faced with this dilemma without this drama," Sullivan said.

The new prosecutors said their office has been in compliance and that Callaghan and Plisner had not been afforded due process before they were sanctioned. Sullivan disagreed.

Prosecutors also asked Sullivan to strike the contempt order against Plisner and Callaghan from the record. The judge said she would consider it.

Alan Jackson, Garcia's attorney, said investigators brought sealed envelopes to court Friday but he and the other defense lawyers were not allowed to open them.

"We are absolutely no closer to getting the substantive discovery," he said, asking for the judge to release his client in the meantime. Garcia remains held without bail.

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