



# PRESS RELEASE

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## **MANLY, STEWART & FINALDI SETTLE NEW CHILD SEX ABUSE LAWSUITS FOR \$8.5 MILLION AGAINST SCANDAL PLAGUED REDLANDS UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT**

**Irvine, California** - Attorneys representing four alleged victims of former Redlands High School drama teacher Joel Koonce announced a new settlement totaling the aggregate amount of \$8.5 million.

“This settlement was reached in less than 30 days which reflects the gravity of the offenses and the immense harm done to our clients” said victims’ attorney Morgan Stewart, a partner in Manly, Stewart & Finaldi. “Redlands Unified recognized the harm to these students and acted honorably in settling the cases without extensive litigation to allow these students to heal from this abuse.”

“Unlike in the Kirkland matter, where former counsel for Redlands rejected an \$8 million dollar settlement demand early in the claim, to ultimately settle for \$15.7 million, this settlement stands in stark contrast to that situation.” Morgan Stewart stated. “Here, in what should be a model for all school districts facing sexual abuse cases, the district acknowledged the harm to these students, and settled quickly.”

“While this is a step in the right direction, the administration still has a long way to go, particularly in resolving the culture that allowed these abuses to occur. All these incidents have occurred under the watch of District Human Resource Director Sabine Robertson Philips. A change in administration in this district is necessary to protect children and taxpayers,” said Mr. Stewart.

Since 2016, Redlands Unified has paid \$30 million to settle three major claims for childhood sexual abuse, involving former teachers, Laura Whitehurst, Kevin Kirkland and Brian Townsley, all former teachers at Redlands High School.

The alleged perpetrator in this case, Joel Koonce, has pleaded not guilty to 15 felony charges, including charges of oral copulation with a person under the age of 18, sexual intercourse, child molesting, sexual penetration by a foreign object, distributing or showing pornography to a minor, sodomy of person under 18, and sexual exploitation of a child.

Koonce's arrest followed action by victim's attorney Morgan Stewart who assisted police investigators with information that ultimately led to Koonce's arrest. According to published reports, Koonce was also working as a character at Disneyland in Anaheim and working with another local school district.

Mr. Stewart's firm still has pending claims against Redlands Unified School District involving other teachers' that the District has not resolved. Mr. Stewart added: "It is the hope that the District will offer the same healing process to this victims without long drawn out litigation."

Mr. Stewart has once again renewed his call for a separate and independent investigation of the district by state and federal authorities in the belief that these horrible sexual cases will continue without action by outside law enforcement agencies.

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[Manly, Stewart & Finaldi](#) is California's leading law firm representing child victims of sexual abuse. The firm has represented more than 150 victims of clergy sexual abuse in California and hundreds of others throughout the United States. The firm also represented plaintiffs in the \$140,000,000 settlement against LAUSD in the Miramonte case, the largest sex abuse settlement against a School District in the US. The firm currently represents more than 180 alleged victims of former Michigan State University and U.S. Women's Gymnastics Olympic Team doctor Larry Nassar. Michigan State University has settled this case for \$500,000,000, the largest settlement of any personal injury case against a University. In 2018 the firm settled cases against the Torrance Unified School District for \$31 million on behalf of alleged victims of former wrestling coach and convicted child molester Thomas Snider, against Los Angeles Unified School district for \$8 million in cases involving former football coach and convicted child molester Jaime Jimenez and for \$14 million in cases involving former Los Angeles Unified District employee Ronnie Lee Roman.