

Lake County Sheriff's Office



Christopher Covelli, Sergeant
Public Information Officer
Criminal Investigations Division
Desk: 847.377.4180
Fax: 847.984.5738
Date: October 25, 2019

25 S. Martin Luther King Jr., Ave
Waukegan, Illinois 60087

www.lakecountyil.gov/sheriff

John D. Idleburg
Sheriff

MEDIA RELEASE

School Paraprofessional Charged Following Excessive Force Investigation

Lake County Sheriff John Idleburg and Lake County State's Attorney Michael Nerheim have announced that a \$50,000 arrest warrant has been issued for a former Special Education District of Lake County (SEDOL) paraprofessional on six counts of reckless conduct after allegations surfaced he used excessive force on students while working at Gages Lake School.

The six class A misdemeanor charges against Nicholas Izquierdo, 30, of the 2900 block of West Glen Flora Avenue, Waukegan, for causing minor injuries to four students while working at the SEDOL facility. Izquierdo is in police custody and due to appear in front of a bond judge later this afternoon.

SEDOL describes Gages Lake school as a public elementary therapeutic day school for early childhood through sixth grade students who have significant emotional and behavioral needs. The focus of the program is to provide therapeutic interventions to help students manage their social emotional needs while developing their academic skills.

Students attending the school routinely suffer from emotional outbursts, which can lead to students becoming combative with teachers. Staff members are trained to use approved de-escalation strategies up to and including a "physical restraint" hold when necessary to protect themselves and the students. The hold is designed to keep the student secure until the emotional outburst subsides.

The parents of a seven-year-old child contacted the Lake County Sheriff's Office on May 19, 2019, to report they believed their child was injured by Izquierdo at Gages Lake School in the 1800 block of Gages lake Road, where the 7-year-old was enrolled as a student. An investigation was launched into the allegations by the Lake County Sheriff's Office Criminal Investigations Division, Lake County State's Attorney's Office, and Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS). SEDOL has been cooperative throughout the investigation.

During the course of the investigation, several more incidents were identified through a review of video surveillance

at the facility. Additional parents also came forward alleging their children were handled excessively by Izquierdo.

All children involved in these incidents were interviewed at the Lake County Children's Advocacy Center and hours of video surveillance were reviewed by Lake County Sheriff's Detectives and the Lake County State's Attorney's Office. Interviews were conducted with numerous SEDOL employees, and subpoenas were issued for school and employment records of the staff involved in the incident.

The investigation revealed Izquierdo did not use proper techniques and acted recklessly on six separate occasions that led to children receiving minor injuries. During several instances, Izquierdo grabbed a child by the leg and pulled, causing the child to fall to the ground. In other instances, Izquierdo pushed or pulled a child, causing the child to fall or strike a wall. Izquierdo also grabbed a child by the arm and twisted it.

Following a review of the facts and evidence, the Lake County State's Attorney's Office approved charges for Izquierdo.

Sheriff John Idleburg said, "Teachers and school paraprofessionals have a career which is rewarding and at times challenging. While I understand it may be stressful when interacting with children who are physically acting out, there is a line which may never be crossed – adults, particularly adults who've received training on the proper way to restrain a child in these situations, cannot use excessive force. We appreciate the cooperation and collaboration with the Lake County State's Attorney's Office, SEDOL, and DCFS throughout this investigation. We wish nothing but the very best for the victims in this case and their families."

"I understand educators in this type of environment have a very difficult job to do, but this specific individual went too far," said State's Attorney Nerheim. "I applaud all the investigators from the different agencies involved for doing a very thorough job in this extremely difficult case."

Izquierdo was arrested by the Lake County Sheriff's Office Warrants Team at approximately 12:00PM today, at a business in Vernon Hills. He remains held in the Lake County jail pending an initial court hearing this afternoon.

All suspects are presumed innocent unless proven guilty in a court of law.

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