



ANNAPOLIS

Abuse lawsuits against Key School in Annapolis accumulate as challenge against child victims law continues

By Alex Mann
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The Key School in Annapolis faces four new lawsuits alleging child sex abuse committed by faculty more than 50 years ago, attorneys for the plaintiffs say.

The complaints bring to at least six the number of lawsuits brought against the small private school under the state's new Child Victims Act, which lifted the statute of limitations on civil actions for child sex abuse, and come as the [landmark law experiences a legal challenge](#) by the Catholic Church. The fight over the law's constitutionality is widely expected to go to the Supreme Court of Maryland.

Two women filed lawsuits against the Key School shortly after the new law took effect Oct. 1, while four more complaints trickled in later in October and November, bringing the number of lawsuits filed against the private school to at least six. Each of the women is in her 60s.

Their lawsuits, filed in Anne Arundel County Circuit Court, say that male faculty members at the school groomed and then repeatedly sexually assaulted the women when they were students in the 1970s, a similar pattern of allegations that their attorneys are citing in an argument to join the complaints into one lawsuit against Key School. The lawsuits seek damages to be determined by a jury.

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“What happened to us is permanently damaging,” one survivor said in a statement provided by her attorneys. “In a K-12 school, adults are responsible for students’ well-being as minors. Instead, this level of abuse has instilled ongoing trauma, which is incomprehensible to anyone who did not experience it.”

The Baltimore Sun does not identify victims of sexual abuse without their permission.

The lawsuits against the Key School come years after it hired a law firm to conduct an eight-month investigation into allegations of decades of sexual abuse at the school. The report, [released in 2019](#) following a social media campaign by



former students to call attention to sexual misconduct at the school, found 10 adult employees engaged in sexual misconduct or inappropriate relationships with at least 16 students from the 1970s through the 1990s.

“Key School administrators, faculty and staff promoted a highly sexualized environment in which faculty predators viewed students as sexual objects and exploited them,” said one of the women’s lawsuits, adding that the school knew certain faculty were “were engaged in the sexual abuse of students and Defendants failed to act.”

In a statement, Key School Head of School Matthew Nespole cited the 2018 investigation conducted by the law firm the school retained.

“Key School has taken action to support the health and well-being of victims and worked tirelessly to put systems in place to ensure the health and safety of everyone in our community,” Nespole said. “This includes establishing a Survivor Therapy Fund, enacting strict policies, procedures and practices to protect students, and establishing multiple avenues for anonymous reporting.”

“While we await the court’s ruling on the constitutionality of the Child Victims Act,” Nespole continued, “Key School will continue supporting victims and providing an exceptional education to our students.”

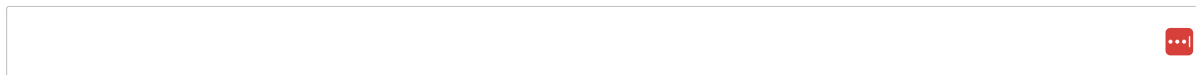
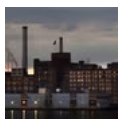
An attorney for the school did not respond to a request for comment Tuesday.

Lawyers on the cases are currently negotiating to freeze all of the lawsuits until the state Supreme Court weighs in on the constitutionality of the Child Victims Act, Rob Jenner, one of the plaintiffs’ attorneys, told The Sun.

It’ll be up to an Anne Arundel County Circuit judge to ultimately decide whether to halt the cases.

It’s a decision that many judges around the state likely are considering, or will have to take up, after the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Washington, which is incorporated in Maryland, earlier this month [raised a legal challenge to the state’s child victims law](#) in separate lawsuits filed against the church in Prince George’s and Montgomery counties.

The Washington archdiocese argues in both cases that the Child Victims Act is unconstitutional. The church’s lawyers argue a 2017 Maryland law allowing victims of child sex abuse to file lawsuits until they turned 38 included a provision providing



The Prince George’s County complaint is a class-action lawsuit that says three men were sexually abused as children by priests or other archdiocese personnel while they attended churches or schools in Prince George’s or Montgomery counties.

The Montgomery County lawsuit alleges a man suffered “horrific” sexual abuse at the hands of a priest in a Gaithersburg church he attended as a child. The church knew of the priest’s predatory behavior before the plaintiff was abused, but allowed the clergyman to continue to interact with children, according to the complaint.

The archdiocese denied the allegations raised in both complaints in its argument to dismiss the cases on constitutional grounds.

Though they are separate cases, the plaintiffs’ first opportunity to defend the constitutionality of the law is due Dec. 8.



The Key School campus, in the community of Hillsmere, with the South River in the background. (Courtesy of Dan Harris)

Trial judges presiding over other lawsuits brought under the child victims law are likely to let the state Supreme Court determine whether it's constitutional before embarking upon lengthy, and costly, litigation that could be overturned depending on the high court's ruling.

Jenner said he and other plaintiffs' attorneys involved in the cases briefed clients on the likely constitutional challenge, describing it as a "long journey."

"As survivors of institutional abuse," one survivor's statement said, "I hope we have the opportunity to tell our truth in a Maryland courtroom."



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