

# The Star-Ledger

## **New sex abuse lawsuits roll in as N.J. law takes effect**

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Three years ago Sunday, Carolyn Fortney woke up in a hospital.

She had tried to end her life, she said, because of sexual abuse she endured from a priest decades ago. Her sisters were with her then, and three were next to her Monday in Newark, when the family announced a new lawsuit against Newark's Archdiocese.

"Did they know he was a pedophile, prior to moving him to PA?" asked Lara Fortney-McKeever, one of Carolyn's sisters who said she was also abused in Pennsylvania by the same priest.

"This day will help me to finally get the answers," she said.

Sunday marked the beginning of a two-year window for people to file lawsuits against their abusers and the institutions that protected them, because of a new law that vastly expands when people are allowed to sue.

Even after the two-year window ends, on Nov. 30, 2021, people who were molested as children will still be able to file lawsuits until they turn 55, or seven years after they discover that they were abused.

Advocates and lawmakers praised the change.

Because it can take decades for survivors to be ready to share, New Jersey's law is one of the best in the country, according to Child USA, a Philadelphia-based nonprofit that supports expanding statutes of limitations.

"I hope the news that victims can begin filing their cases under this new law spreads far and wide," state Sen. Joseph Vitale, D-Middlesex, one of the bill's sponsor, said in a statement.

The number of new suits was not immediately known, and a message left with a court spokeswoman was not returned.

However, more than 20 had already been filed against the Boy Scouts of America as of Monday afternoon, and local Catholic dioceses faced at least 17, according to online court records.

Law firms around the country announced they had filed dozens against a host of groups.

Nearly 40 were filed Sunday against the Boy Scouts, New Jersey's Catholic Dioceses and other institutions by the firms Rebenack, Aronow and Mascolo, as well as Pfau, Cochran, Vertetis and Amala. Three suits were co-filed Monday against some of the same dioceses by Herman Law, and a spokeswoman for the firm said "dozens" more were on the way.

At least one lawsuit targets former Cardinal Theodore McCarrick, the one-time archbishop of the Archdiocese of Newark, according to Jeff Anderson and Associates and attorney Greg Gianforcaro. McCarrick has denied previous claims.

Spokespeople for the Newark Archdiocese and Boy Scouts previously expressed remorse, and said they would work with victims.

New York, which opened a similar window in August, has seen more than 1,100 new abuse cases, according to a New York Unified Court System spokesman.

About 20 more lawsuits will be filed in New Jersey in the coming months by Andreozzi and Associates, according to Benjamin Andreozzi, who represents two Fortney sisters.

The Fortneys are also suing the Diocese of Harrisburg.

The family has testified widely in support of New Jersey's law. The man they said abused them, Augustine Giella, was one of the 188 "credibly accused" priests named by the state's five dioceses earlier this year.

Giella was arrested at his retirement home in Manchester, N.J., in 1992, and died while awaiting trial.

*NJ Advance Media staff writer Joe Atmonavage contributed to this report.*