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by The Associated Press

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A Rhode Island man alleges that he was molested as a child by a Roman Catholic priest who also trafficked children for sex while church leaders looked the other way, according to a lawsuit filed against the Diocese of Providence.

Robert Houllahan, 51, of Providence, said in the suit filed Feb. 27 that he was sexually abused by the late Rev. Normand Demers, who received the “protection and affirmative assistance” of the diocese and its leaders, [The Providence Journal reported](#).

The diocese, current Bishop Thomas Tobin and retired Bishop Louis Gelineau are among the defendants named in the suit.

The diocese said in a statement Feb. 28 that it had not received a copy of the lawsuit, “stoking allegations from several decades ago against a deceased former priest.” Demers was removed from ministry in 2002 following a credible allegation of abuse, the diocese said.

Gelineau, when reached by the newspaper, said he would not be able to analyze the issues or recall facts enough to make a comment.

Demers, who died in 2018, was involved with foreign missions that had been described as orphanages or schools but that were in fact known to the diocese as a source of child sexual abuse victims, according to the suit.

The diocese also assigned Demers to a parish even after learning he had been charged with abusing children in Haiti, also according to the suit.

Houllahan does not say he was trafficked for sex but said he saw children from Central America when he was brought to Demers' private quarters in 1976 in the rectory of St. Joseph, where he was molested by Demers and another man, according to his allegations in the lawsuit, which seeks unspecified damages.

Houllahan was "severely and permanently injured, and suffered and will continue to suffer severe pain, emotional distress, anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress syndrome, humiliation, embarrassment, and loss of self esteem" as a result of the abuse, according to the suit.

Demers was included on a list released by the diocese last year of clerics who had been "credibly accused" of sexually abusing minors.

"All allegations against Demers have been reported to law enforcement," the diocese said in its statement. "For over 20 years it has been diocesan policy to report each and every allegation of clergy sexual abuse of a minor — regardless of credibility — to law enforcement."

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