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Cardinal George Pell arrives at the County Court in Melbourne, Australia, on Feb. 27, 2019. The father of a deceased former choirboy filed a lawsuit against Cardinal George Pell and the Catholic Church in an Australian court on Thursday, July 14, 2022 claiming the parent suffered psychological injury over an accusation that the once-senior Vatican official sexually abused the son. (AP Photo/Andy Brownbill, File)

by Associated Press

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July 14, 2022

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The father of a deceased former choirboy filed a lawsuit against Cardinal George Pell and the Catholic Church in an Australian court on Thursday claiming the parent suffered psychological injury over an accusation that the once-senior Vatican official sexually abused the son.

Neither the father nor the son can be named under Australian laws that conceal the identities of victims of sexual abuse.

The father said in 2019 he was considering legal action seeking damages when Pell, Pope Francis' former finance minister, was sentenced to six years in prison on jury convictions for abusing the son and another choirboy in a Melbourne cathedral in the 1990s. Both boys were 13 years old at the time.

Pell, now 81, had his convictions overturned by the High Court in 2020 after he had spent 13 months in prison. He has since been based in Sydney and holds no Vatican position.

The father's civil case was brought before the Victoria state Supreme Court for the first time on Thursday. Justice Michael McDonald adjourned the case until Aug. 4 when questions over legal defenses will be resolved.

Pell has always maintained his innocence.

The father's lawyer, Lisa Flynn, said the unanimous decision of the High Court's seven judges to acquit Pell only related to the criminal law, not civil law.

A criminal case must be proved beyond reasonable doubt while a civil case needs to be proved to a lower standard on the balance of probabilities.

"There are different paths to justice and different avenues that survivors of abuse have," Flynn told reporters.

The father claims to have suffered nervous shock arising from his son's alleged assault by Pell, then the 55-year-old Melbourne archbishop.

The father also suffered from chronic adjustment disorder and persistent complex bereavement disorder, with mixed anxiety and a depressed mood, court documents show.

The father said he lost money due to medical expenses and lost his earning capacity. He has not nominated a monetary sum for his damages.

The father had no knowledge of the abuse allegation when his son died of a heroin overdose in 2014 at age 31.

The son's friend and fellow choirboy, who also cannot be identified, attended the funeral and signed a police statement a year later alleging they had both been abused in a cathedral back room.

The father first became aware of the allegation when questioned by police in 2016.

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