

## [News](#)

Brooke Schultz

[View Author Profile](#)

Associated Press/Report for America

[View Author Profile](#)

## [Join the Conversation](#)

August 10, 2023

[Share on Facebook](#)[Share on Twitter](#)[Email to a friend](#)[Print](#)

The Archdiocese of Philadelphia will pay \$3.5 million to settle a civil case alleging a now-deceased priest sexually assaulted a teenage boy nearly two decades ago, and church officials knew of similar reports about the priest dating back to the 1970s, attorneys for the victim announced Aug. 9.

The plaintiff was a 14-year-old student in religious classes at St. Katherine of Siena Parish in Wayne when the sexual assault occurred in 2006, his attorneys said. They said Msgr. John Close assaulted the boy after hearing his confession. The plaintiff, now 30, reported the episode in 2018. Many survivors of child sexual abuse do not report the abuse until years later.

Close [died](#) in 2018. Attorneys for the plaintiff say the archdiocese knew Close was a danger to children in the 1970s, after a priest reported teenage boys were sleeping overnight in Close's room. Close was reassigned. Other alleged victims have come forward, attorneys said.

"We deeply regret the pain suffered by any survivor of child sexual abuse and have a sincere desire to help victims on their path to healing," Kenneth A. Gavin, spokesperson for the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, said in a statement.

The church hierarchy denies knowing about the plaintiff's allegation prior to Close's death, and reported it to law enforcement after it was brought forward by the attorneys, an archdiocese spokesperson said in a statement.

Close was ordained in 1969 and was placed in a variety of parishes and schools until he was put on administrative leave, with priestly faculties restricted, in 2011. He retired in 2012.

Attorneys for the plaintiff assert in court filing that a 2011 grand jury's [report](#) — which examined whether the diocese had changed its internal practices of moving priests accused of sexual abuse and not reporting the allegations to law enforcement — prompted church officials to reevaluate earlier reports about Close, resulting in his publicly-disclosed administrative leave that year. The archdiocese did not immediately say why Close was placed on leave at that time.

The lawsuit was settled ahead of trial.

The Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests called on the archdiocese to locate and assist any other potential victims of Close. The group urged other victims to come forward and make reports and seek support.

"By taking these steps, we can help create a safer environment for children, aid in the recovery of survivors, ensure the prosecution of criminals, deter cover-ups, and ultimately uncover the truth," said Mike McDonnell, the network's interim executive director.

## Advertisement

In 2018, [a grand jury found](#) that hundreds of Roman Catholic priests in Pennsylvania molested more than 1,000 children — and possibly many more — since the 1940s, and senior church officials systematically covered up the abuse.

The report put the number of abusive clergy at more than 300. In nearly all of the cases, the statute of limitations had run out, meaning criminal charges could not be filed. More than 100 of the priests are dead, and many others are retired or have been dismissed from the priesthood or put on leave.

Seven of the state's eight dioceses launched [victim compensation funds](#) following the grand jury report. The funds were open to claims for a limited time. The Archdiocese of Philadelphia has paid \$78.5 million to 438 claimants, as of a [2022 report](#).

Lawmakers in Pennsylvania sought a [two-year window](#) for child sexual abuse survivors to file otherwise outdated lawsuits over their claims, but a partisan fight in the Legislature kept the proposal bottled up with no resolution in sight.