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As deadline for Mount Cashel compensation claims approaches, victims discuss impact of abuse

'It's a story of resilience as much as it's a story of harm': lawyer Geoff Budden

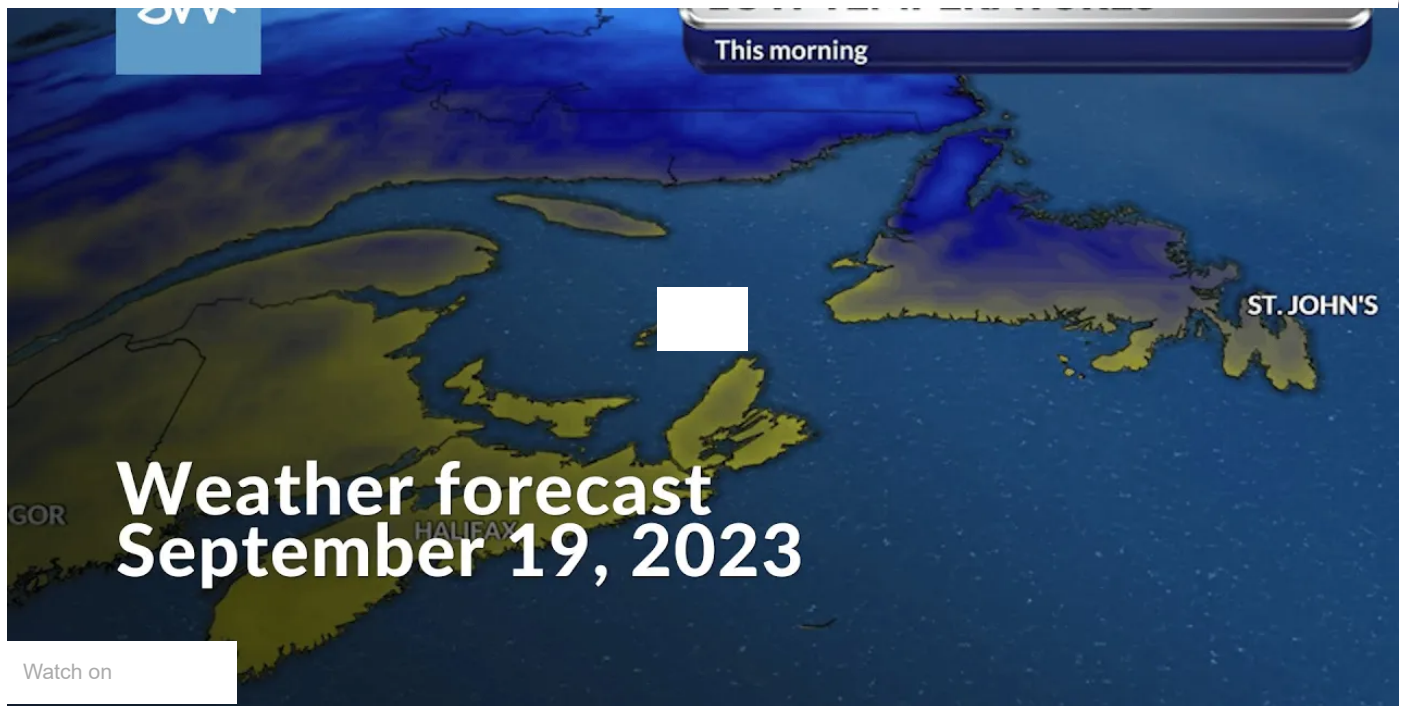
Tara Bradbury - Reporter | Posted: 5 hours ago | Updated: 5 hours ago | 5 Min Read



Geoff Budden, a lawyer representing victims of sexual abuse at the former Mount Cashel Orphanage, speaks to reporters following a hearing at Newfoundland and Labrador Supreme Court Wednesday, April 19, 2023. - Tara Bradbury

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ST. JOHN'S, N.L. — Over the past few months, St. John's lawyer Geoff Budden has been meeting with Mount Cashel orphanage victims, hearing directly from them about the lasting impact of sexual abuse by certain Christian Brothers decades ago.

Many of them are elderly. All are Newfoundlanders, though they live across the country, in the United States and beyond. Some have a view of this province as separate from the abuse they endured and still have a fondness for the place; others can't bear to come back here, describing to Budden recurring nightmares lasting more than half a century of being trapped in a car headed towards St. John's with no way to escape.

The impacts of the abuse have been varied and intrusive to individual degrees on facets of life that include health, employment, relationships and self-esteem. While each of the men has dealt with it uniquely, it's clear they've all been affected by the trauma inflicted on them as children at the orphanage and are ready to finally see some justice, Budden says.

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Lawyers representing the Roman Catholic Episcopal Corporation of St. John's and survivors of abuse at Mount Cashel prepare to leave Newfoundland and Labrador Supreme Court after proceedings Tuesday, May 30, 2023. TARA BRADBURY · THE TELEGRAM - Tara Bradbury

"It's a story of resilience as much as it's a story of harm," Budden said Monday. "It's nice to see how many have made lives for themselves, despite having this real challenge. It's difficult for them to share their story because it comes with some awkwardness and embarrassment, which is understandable, but this was something that happened to a child or an adolescent that they had no control over. I tend to see these as stories of people who dealt with something really terrible and have all survived it."

Budden's legal team has been working long hours since the claims process for Mount Cashel survivors got underway in the spring, preparing the men's individual claims for financial compensation, which include a 20-page questionnaire that can be supplemented with up to 15 pages of legal arguments and supporting documents. The deadline for survivors to make a claim is Sept. 30 and Budden says his firm continues, even at this late stage, to receive new calls every day.

Budden is but one of the representative lawyers, and he represented nearly 100 Mount Cashel victims earlier in the year; the number has significantly increased since then. The men's claims are being adjudicated by a panel appointed by Global Resolutions Inc., a Toronto-based dispute resolution firm with experience in sexual abuse claims, as agreed upon by the claimants, the Roman Catholic Episcopal Corp. of St. John's (RCESJ) and monitor Ernst & Young.

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Compensation process for survivors of abuse at Mount Cashel orphanage in St. John's gets underway



'Let's get on with it,' judge says, bringing Mount Cashel abuse survivors one step closer to getting compensation



The panel will assess each claim and determine the amount of compensation to be paid, and it expects to be able to complete the process by the end of the year. It has discretion when it comes to considering claims from deceased victims, previous compensation awards, and determining the amount of interest that can be applied.

The identities of the claimants will not be publicly disclosed.

The compensation has been a long time coming, with the case working its way through the courts since 1999, when 39 former residents of the Mount Cashel orphanage filed statements of claim alleging they were abused during the 1940s, '50s and '60s by certain Christian Brothers who ran the facility.

The courts have found the archdiocese vicariously liable for the abuse of children at Mount Cashel and the RCECSJ has been granted creditor protection while it sells churches and other properties to collect the funds to settle the claims.

Documents submitted to the court in June suggested the RCECSJ could have \$43,291,117 available by the end of the year to settle the claims with abuse survivors, though there were still properties to sell at that point. Budden has previously estimated up to \$50 million could be required.

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