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'We're a wounded province and it delays us all from healing': Compensation process delays for N.L. clergy abuse survivors disappointing, says advocate

Survivors of clergy abuse won't see compensation until June 2024 at the earliest; funds originally expected in 2023

Tara Bradbury - Reporter | Posted: April 19, 2024, 6:47 p.m. | Updated: April 19, 2024, 6:47 p.m. | 6 Min Read



St. John's activist and clergy abuse victim Gemma Hickey (third from left) in Italy with fellow victims and allies on a pilgrimage from Montefiascone to St. Peter's Square in the fall of 2023. The group called on the Vatican to implement a zero-tolerance law for sexual abuse by church officials. CONTRIBUTED

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ST. JOHN'S, N.L. — A two-month procedural delay preventing survivors of clergy abuse from receiving compensation might be insignificant in terms of time span, but it's important when it comes to the ongoing trauma, says advocate Gemma Hickey.

"Survivors serve a life sentence. Trauma is passed down in one form or another. Communities are traumatized, too. We're a wounded province and it delays us all from healing," Hickey says.

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Delayed until June

Initially expected to have been completed by the end of 2023 and then revised to have an April 2024 completion date, the adjudication process for survivors of abuse by the Christians Brothers at Mount Cashel orphanage and other members of the Roman Catholic archdiocese of St. John's (RCECS) [won't wrap up until the end of June, it was revealed Thursday, April 18.](#)

Nearly 370 claims have been filed against the RCECSJ, and are now in the hands of an independent adjudication panel, which will determine liability and value of each one.

The number of claims is more than was originally expected, and issues have arisen related to the process for evaluating claims from deceased victims and those who have previously received compensation for the abuse.



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

Some inaccuracies

Those issues were addressed in Newfoundland and Labrador Supreme Court in St. John's Thursday.

Some of the claims have been filed by people acting on behalf of their late spouses and involve estates that have not yet been probated. Lawyers for the claimants proposed a process that would see the claims valued before probate, putting off what could be a significant expense for the partners of deceased abuse victims, many of them in their 80s and 90s.

In some cases, the abuse victims have already received compensation through other settlements, which they were asked to disclose as part of their current claim.

Inaccurate amounts of previous compensation have been discovered on a handful of the claims; for the most part, it's a result of small mathematical errors and involved a discrepancy of \$200 or less, lawyer Geoff Budden, who represents 219 claimants, told the court.

The matter will return to court May 10 to address a protocol for verifying prior compensation, which may require a judicial order compelling third parties, like the province, to disclose details of settlement claims.

Twenty-four years

The case has been before the courts since for 24 years. Thirty-nine former residents of the Mount Cashel orphanage filed statements of claim in 1999

alleging they were abused during the 1940s, '50s and '60s by certain Christian Brothers who ran the facility.

The courts have found the RCECSJ vicariously liable for the abuse of children at Mount Cashel and other areas of the archdiocese.

The RCECSJ has been granted creditor protection for the past two years or so, while it sells properties to collect the funds to settle the claims, and has raised just over \$40 million, including \$13 million from the sale of 32 schools on the Avalon and Burin peninsulas to the province.

Raising awareness

Hickey is the founder of the Pathways Foundation, a non-profit that supports people who have experienced abuse within religious organizations, and is board president of Ending Clergy Abuse, a Washington-based international organization working to compel the Roman Catholic Church to end its structural mechanism that allows abuse.

Last year, Hickey, a clergy abuse survivor from St. John's, [travelled to Italy with other North American survivors and supporters](#) for a 130-km trek to St. Peter's Square with an eight-foot wooden cross and a request for Pope Francis to sign into canonical law a zero-tolerance policy on abuse.

Currently, church law allows clergy members who have sexually abused a child or vulnerable adults to remain in ministry.

In January, [Hickey returned to Rome](#) by invitation to deliver a lecture to religious scholars at the Pontifical Gregorian University about the proposed zero-tolerance policy.



Gemma Hickey (right) poses in Italy with Rev. Hans Zollner of the Pontifical Gregorian University, an ecclesiastical authority on clergy sexual abuse. - Submitted photo

'Ground Zero' is N.L.

Hickey also spoke about their own experience, and of Newfoundland and Labrador as “Ground Zero” for clergy abuse in Canada.

While the abuse survivors serve a lengthy sentence, the abusers do not, Hickey says.

“Many abusers, due to the church’s protection, are able to move on with their lives, continue on as priests, brothers and nuns without facing any real consequences. This type of abuse bleeds into every aspect of your life. It goes deeper than the physical, and infiltrates your entire being,” Hickey says.

“It influences not only the relationship you have with yourself but also your relationship to others. The intergenerational layer runs deep.”

Disappointing delay

Hickey, who is preparing to return to Rome in June, says the two-month delay in the claims adjudication process, while understandable, is disappointing.

"Although a slight delay, it prevents survivors and their families from getting the much-needed closure they deserve," Hickey said.

"While I understand that this process takes time and I know everyone involved is working hard, many survivors are elderly and have waited long enough."

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