

Karen McVeigh
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Penn State report on cover-up a 'treasure trove' for civil lawsuits

Lawyer for one of Jerry Sandusky's victims says report by former FBI director could inform a slew of cases against Penn State

A lawyer for one of the victims of Penn State's former football coach Jerry Sandusky has said a damning internal investigation into the child sex abuse scandal contained a "treasure trove" of information which could inform civil and other cases against the university.

The report by former FBI director Louis Freeh found that Penn State officials, including the president and vice-president, concealed critical facts that enabled Sandusky, convicted of serial child sex abuse last month, to continue abusing children for 14 years.

Tom Kline, attorney for a man referred to as Victim 5 in the criminal trial, said: "The principal information is contained in documents attached to the report and they are truly a treasure trove. They need careful viewing and analysis, certainly by me and by others."

Kline, who intends to sue the university on behalf of his client, said the damning report will serve as a "template, a road map" for not only lawyers bringing civil cases but for others looking into the case, including the attorney general, the department of education and the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). All are investigating aspects of the scandal.

The Freeh report confirmed what he had long suspected, Kline said: that officials decided against telling police of a report of abuse against Sandusky in 2001 despite knowing of earlier allegations.

"The headline to me is the revelation about 1998," said Kline, in reference to an incident in which a parent reported to the police inappropriate behaviour by Sandusky.

"I had always suspected, but I had no information, about the events that were described in the criminal trial about the mother of the boy in the shower and the investigation. That it was known all the way up to the president at the university. That context was shocking.

"That they knew of that when they let the events of 2001 go by without reporting them. He [Sandusky] was a repeat offender by 2001 and they decided not to tell the authorities again. That's a big piece of information.

"Sandusky is the perpetrator, Penn State has been found as his enabler."

The Freeh report concluded Sandusky's abuse might have been prevented if university officials had banned him from bringing children onto campus after a 1998 police inquiry.

The police inquiry was sparked when the mother of a boy reported Sandusky's inappropriate behaviour with him in the shower. Freeh's report concluded that Joe Paterno, Penn State's venerated football coach, and three

others exhibited a "striking lack of empathy for Sandusky's victims" by failing to find out about them, in particular by not trying to determine the identity of another boy who was assaulted by Sandusky in a shower in 2001.

Kline said that, had Sandusky been reported to the authorities at that point, in February 2001, his client may not have suffered at the hands of the football coach six months down the line.

"The young man I represent was molested in August 2001. It has been a hard road for him," the lawyer said.

Kline said that for his client and the other victims, every revelation has a "significant effect".

"This began for him with a knock on the door by the state police in Penn. He has a good job, a college graduation, a good family.

"He found himself in a grand jury investigation. He found himself testifying in a courtroom with the international media. This report is part of a long process. He views it as an obligation of citizenship.

"Every revelation has a significant effect. He has been watching closely, I like to remind people of these young men, who are very attuned to what's happening. The next big event that affects them is the sentencing hearing."

Kline said that he also suspected the timing of Sandusky's resignation in 1999 was related to his sexual abuse of children.

"Mr Freeh was being cautious in not doing so, but I think it's a blinding flash of the obvious, as we say, that there may be a connection.

"When we go further down the road, someone somewhere will speak. I find it incredible that there would be no connection between them all knowing and him retiring."

He said the decision over what the report means for the amount of damages is "some way down the line".

"We are today looking at the issue of accountability as well as an admission of culpability, which Penn State have admitted."

His comments come as Penn State's board prepare meet on Friday for a regularly scheduled session during which the fall-out of the scandal, and the university's culpability may be discussed.