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Penn State board authorizes settlement offers to Sandusky sexual assault victims

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LEMONT FURNACE - The Penn State Board of Trustees today voted to formally extend monetary settlement offers to "a number" of the 30 men who claim they were sexually abused by Jerry Sandusky as children.

No details were provided today on the precise number of cases involved, or the dollar amounts - likely to run in the tens of millions of dollars - being offered. Penn State said it would not discuss those specifics until after the settlements have been finalized.

Trustees said they hope to complete those pending deals within the next several weeks.

But the university has been in negotiations with the claimants since Sandusky's criminal conviction last year, and its negotiators have tentative deals in place with a majority of the individuals, according to the motion approved.

Attorneys for several of those claimants have said in recent weeks that they were close to agreement with Penn State's negotiators, contingent on the board's approval.

That approval came today, without any public discussion, after lengthy private briefings of board members on June 25 and earlier today.

With the action, attorneys for Penn State will be able to attempt to finalize those deals, and perhaps extend new offers to other claimants with whom talks are not as far along.

"Today's action is yet another important step toward the resolution of claims from Sandusky's victims," said Penn State President Rodney Erickson. "... The university intends to deal with these individuals in a fair and expeditious manner."

The university engaged nationally-renowned mass settlement experts Kenneth Feinberg and Michael Rozen last September to represent it in talks with Sandusky's victims, asserting that it wanted to take responsibility for its role in what happened to them.

That offer, apparently, opened the floodgates to contacts from at least triple the number of men who had been selected to testify against Sandusky in criminal court last June, bringing with them varied

allegations dating back to the late 1970s.

Rozen, in interviews with PennLive.com, has always said his team was aiming for "global peace" with the Sandusky claimants, as part of an effort to make good on past missteps with Sandusky and avoid protracted court battles wherever possible.

Such civil cases would not only be a drain of university resources, but would also have the potential to keep the Sandusky scandal in the news for years.

The months since have been filled with fact-gathering and weighting of the claims according to whether the abuses occurred before university officials had reasonable opportunities to stop or even suspect Sandusky; whether abuses occurred on or off campus; and the duration and severity of the molestation.

It is also clear a number of board members had insisted all claims to be vetted as thoroughly as possible.

Sources familiar with the negotiations note that the university has not reached potential points of closure with all claimants. But "there's

a whole bunch of makings of deals in place," said one attorney familiar with the talks.

But others had called this week's meetings a "critical moment" for the process, with eight new members joining the 30-member Penn State board for their first meeting today.

Thomas R. Kline, whose Kline Specter law firm represented the witness at Sandusky's criminal trial known as "Victim 5" said he is among those who expects to receive an offer for his client in the coming weeks.

"Penn State's action today is one more positive step toward settlement of many civil claims," Kline said. "I expect further progress in the weeks ahead."

Sandusky, the longtime defensive coordinator for legendary head coach Joe Paterno, was convicted last year of sexually molesting or raping 10 boys between 1994 and 2008, some at university facilities that he had retained access to after retirement.

Sandusky, 69, is now serving a minimum 30-year term in state prison.