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Statute of limitations one hurdle in Sandusky cases

The allegations have provoked outrage. And, given the highly emotional nature of child sex-abuse cases, it would seem a lawsuit by alleged victims of Penn State assistant football coach Jerry Sandusky might easily succeed - if their stories withstand legal scrutiny.

But that does not mean there will be no legal hurdles.

Among the obstacles is Pennsylvania's statute of limitations for sexual-abuse victims. The legislature amended the law in 2002 to permit adults up to the age of 30, who claim to have been assaulted as minors, to file lawsuits against alleged abusers, if the acts involved force or threats of force. This would seem to liberalize the circumstances under which victims can seek compensation.

But [Shanin Specter](#), a leading Center City plaintiffs' lawyer, says Pennsylvania courts have issued contradictory rulings on what constitutes forcible sexual molestation, and depending which case is cited, victims could be out of luck.

In the case causing the greatest uncertainty, *Commonwealth v. Mlinarich*, the state Supreme Court in 1988 threw out a rape conviction, finding that the convicted rapist had not used force by employing a verbal threat.