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Abuse Victim Reaches \$3.5M Settlement With Phila. Archdiocese After Rejecting \$400K Compensation Fund Offer

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What You Need to Know

- The Archdiocese of Philadelphia reached a \$3.5 million settlement in a former religious school student's sexual abuse lawsuit.
- The plaintiff had initially been offered \$400,000 through the archdiocese's compensation fund.
- The plaintiffs attorney said the nonconfidential nature of the settlement's amount provides a rare insight into what church sex abuse claims are worth.

The Archdiocese of Philadelphia has agreed to pay \$3.5 million to resolve a former religious school student's claims that he was sexually abused by a now-deceased priest, the plaintiff's Kline & Specter attorneys announced Wednesday.

According to Kline & Specter partner Dave Inscho, the accord is a rare—and possibly unique—instance of the monetary amount of a settlement with the archdiocese being public.

Inscho said the nonconfidential number provides insight into the figures that church sex abuse cases can be worth, particularly when compared with what victims have obtained through the Philadelphia Archdiocese compensation fund.

Through the fund, Inscho said, the archdiocese had offered the plaintiff \$400,000 for his claim. But the plaintiff, referred to as J.S., instead chose litigation.

“We knew if we pursued discovery,” Inscho said, “eventually we would be able to get him a better result.”

The archdiocese created the compensation fund in 2018 to handle claims from victims of childhood sexual abuse. As of the publication of a 2022 final report on the program, the archdiocese had paid \$78.5 million to 438 claimants.

According to Inscho, the fund’s highest-value offerings were \$500,000.

He said J.S.’s settlement demonstrates the difference a well-litigated case can make in determining the value of a claim.

J.S., now 30 years old, accused the archdiocese of exposing him and other children to harm by covering up past allegations against Father John Close, the plaintiff’s alleged abuser. J.S. claimed that Close had raped him in 2006 and threatened that J.S. would be damned if he told anyone. J.S. was 12 at the time.

In his pretrial memo, the plaintiff cited numerous abuse allegations lodged against Close dating back to 1969, the year Close was ordained. “Despite multiple reports,” the memo said, “the archdiocese allowed Close to remain in ministry with access and authority over children.”

The archdiocese, represented by Clark Hill, cast doubts on the plaintiff’s credibility and denied negligence for Close’s actions in its pretrial memo. The defendant contended that only one abuse claim had been made against the priest prior to 2006, and an independent investigation could not substantiate it.

But through discovery, Inscho said, plaintiffs counsel were able to identify another purported victim of Close whose claims were similar to J.S.'s. Inscho said that evidence was key to resolving the case.

"The pressure was the testimony, which had been taken of the prior victim, which showed ... Close's MO," he said.

Inscho said the parties reached the settlement the day before jury selection was set to begin in the case for a July trial. He said the agreement was signed Wednesday.

Nicholas Centrella of Clark Hill did not respond to requests for comment.