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Ex-Solebury School student sues school, alleging abuse

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A woman who claims she was sexually abused by her gym teacher at the Solebury School filed suit against the Bucks County boarding school and also plans to cooperate with prosecutors, her attorneys said Friday.

The woman, 29, is the only one of six victims identified in a Feb. 1 grand jury report detailing sexual abuse at the school whose case was within the statute of limitations.

She named the school and the gym teacher, Lyle Hazel, charging abuse between 2003 and 2005 in a complaint filed in Philadelphia Common Pleas Court.

The suit claims negligence, battery, sexual exploitation of children, corruption of a minor, endangering the welfare of a child, and childhood sex abuse.

"What happened while I was a Solebury School student I've buried for so long, yet it has deeply impact-

ed my relationships, my education, my family and friends, my self-worth, my trust in others, my entire life," the victim said in a statement read by her lawyers.

"By the school not taking true responsibility for its actions, each victim will continue to carry the weight and guilt of these crimes as I have and will continue to feel they were at fault. Please let the victim-shaming stop."

The grand jury's report blamed school administrators and an informal culture at the school that blurred boundaries between teachers and students that allowed sexual contact. The report included testimony from six alleged victims, describing sexual contact and relationships between students and faculty at the elite New Hope school from the 1950s on.

The new lawsuit accuses Solebury of allowing the relationship to occur, along with retaliation against the woman by employees, without doing anything, even when her mother complained to administrators. The suit - filed by her attorneys, Jordan

Merson, **Tom Kline**, and Marci Hamilton - also claims the school has not adequately addressed abuse allegations.

The woman's abuse "was common knowledge at Solebury School. No one at the school did anything to help this woman," Merson said at a news conference Friday.

The woman graduated from Solebury in 2005. She described in the grand jury report a relationship with the then-gym teacher and athletic director, Hazel, that allegedly began in her junior year and continued into her college years.

She filed the suit in Philadelphia because Hazel would take her to the city on dates, her attorneys said - dinners, drinks, and sex-shop visits.

Hazel pleaded the Fifth Amendment in front of the grand jury, citing his right to protect against self-incrimination. He could not be reached for comment Friday; his only listed phone number was disconnected, and it was not known if he had a lawyer.

Solebury School headmaster Tom Wilschutz said in a statement Friday that he had not read the complaint and would not comment further because the case is going to court.

The school has "made extensive efforts since my arrival as head in 2008 to strengthen our policies, procedures and training," he said. "As I have said previously, we strive to move forward with openness and integrity for the victims of abuse, for our entire community and for this institution that we care for so deeply."

Wilschutz has said the school would "review" 18 recommendations made by the grand jury for reform at the 220-student institution.

The woman's attorneys claim the school has not made changes.

The suit says the woman's life course was "completely derailed" as a result of the school's negligence and describes the campus as allowing staff to have sex, get drunk, and use drugs together, and sometimes including students.

The woman never graduated from college. She was confined to her bed and home with depression for many years and still "struggles every day," Merson said Friday.

"She carries a burden for all the victims of abuse at Solebury," he said earlier this month. "The mantle has really been passed to [her] ... to hold this school accountable and responsible for what's gone on for the past 50 years, and that is not lost on her."