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# Child Victims Act sex-abuse window sends shockwaves across Staten Island; churches, clergy, coaches, parents accused

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Named in lawsuits filed on Wednesday are, from left, Monsignor Farrell High School, Monsignor Raphael Pakulniewicz, St. Clare's Church and Monsignor John Paddack.



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STATEN ISLAND, N.Y. -- A one-year window allowing adults who allege they were sexually abused as children to sue opened on Wednesday and sent shockwaves across Staten Island, with lawsuits being filed against Roman Catholic schools and churches, a youth athletic institution and even one man's parents.

The alleged abusers included the names of prominent borough clergy, coaches, educators and school principals.

Some of the litigations were filed moments after midnight; that's when the [Child Victims Act](#), which was signed into law on Feb. 14 by Gov. Andrew Cuomo, went into effect, lifting the statute of limitations which, for decades, left victims powerless.

## **NEW ARCHDIOCESE ALLEGATIONS**

One lawsuit brought by a group of attorneys in state Supreme Court in Manhattan alleges 19 victims, either named or designed by initials, were abused at facilities overseen by the Archdiocese of New York. At least six alleged victims in the filing claim they were abused on Staten Island.

St. Anthony of Padua R.C. Church in Travis, Our Lady Star of the Sea R.C. Church in Huguenot, Monsignor Farrell High School in Oakwood and St. Clare's R.C. Church in Great Kills are named in the suit, which was filed by attorneys for Marsh Law Firm and Pfau Cochran Vertetis Amala.

All of the alleged Island victims are male and at least three of them claim their mistreatment occurred at Monsignor Farrell. The alleged abuse stems from the 1960s and 1970s.

James Larney, who lives in upstate Hudson, maintains that he was victimized by Monsignor Raphael Pakulniewicz at St. Anthony of Padua Church when he was approximately 12 or 13 years old. Larney and his family belonged to the parish.

"From approximately 1966 through 1968, Monsignor Pakulniewicz exploited the trust and authority vested in him by defendants by grooming James to gain his trust and to obtain control over him as part of Monsignor Pakulniewicz's plan to sexually molest and abuse James..." according to the lawsuit.



organist for the defendants...Monsignor Pakulniewicz would go into the choir loft during Mass for lengthy periods of time while James was up in the loft alone."

Peter Caloger claims that he was sexually abused by Father Edwin Franklin, a religious brother and teacher at Our Lady Star of the Sea R.C. Church and School, when he was about 13. Father Franklin was employed by the Diocese of Ogdensburg and assigned to Our Lady Star of the Sea, according to the lawsuit.

The abuse of Caloger and other children happened in about 1967 when Caloger was an altar boy and some of the sexual abuse occurred at the parish, according to the lawsuit.

The alleged abuse occurred during church events, "including when Peter and others were volunteering their time to help repair a space to host a 'teen club' that Father Franklin oversaw," according to the lawsuit.

The lawsuit alleges that "while the abuse was ongoing, Father Franklin addressed a group of students stating that he had been accused of 'loving too much.'"

C.Y., a man who currently resides on Staten Island, alleges that he was sexually abused by Brother James X. Curran when he was a 15-year-old student at Monsignor Farrell in the administrative wing and in a classroom, sometimes during after-school detention.

Jim Burke, who lives in Manhattan, and John Hynes of Staten Island, maintain that they were abused at Farrell around 40 years ago as students by Brother Salvatore Ferro.

Burke was abused by Brother Ferro in the nurse's office during school hours, the suit alleges.

Hynes alleges he was 16 to 17 years old when he was sexually abused by Brother Ferro from about 1978 through 1979 during school activities and hours in the nurse's office and in Ferro's office.

The lawsuit alleges that Brother Ferro was Monsignor Farrell's principal when some of the alleged incidents happened.

"Upon his arrival to Monsignor Farrell, John was told by several students that Brother Ferro had sexually abused children in the past," the filing says. "John informed three other teachers at Monsignor Farrell about the sexual abuse but they did nothing in



K.M., a man who lives in Manhattan, alleges that he was sexually abused as a parishioner by Father Ralph LaBelle at St. Clare's Church around 1979, when he was about six, "including during his first reconciliation and church services."



Former Monsignor Farrell Principal John Paddack stepped down from his post at Church of Notre Dame recently amid claims of past sexual abuse. He is shown at the podium in this 2010 file photo from Monsignor Farrell's graduation.

## **ALLEGATIONS AGAINST PRINCIPAL**

Some of the filings Wednesday include allegations already made public in the weeks and months before the window opened.

Former Staten Island priest Monsignor John Paddack is named in lawsuits, along with the New York Archdiocese, about a month after stepping down from his post at a Manhattan parish.

Several accusers had come forward with claims of past sexual abuse, which allegedly occurred during his time as a teacher at St. Joseph by-the-Sea in Huguenot, a



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A complaint stemming from Monsignor Paddack's time at St. Joseph by-the-Sea alleges that from 2001 to 2002, he engaged in "unpermitted sexual contact" with Staten Island resident Joseph Caramanno, who was 16 and 17 years old at the time.

"...you can't sleep at night, and you wonder what can help," said Caramanno at a press conference in June.

The first to come forward was Rafael Mendoza, who spoke to the press about his experiences at Cardinal Hayes High School in the Bronx.

Mendoza alleged that as a freshman in 1996, he was feeling depressed and suicidal, and Monsignor Paddack instructed him to take off his clothes, then, grabbed his genitals and examined him with a stethoscope.

"He'd unbuckle my pants and grab my genitals," Mendoza said. "His face would get bloodshot red."

"Through our investigation and our support of (the victim), he was able to come forward and publicly name a priest who had not been named publicly before and who actually was still in service," said attorney Michelle Simpson Tuegel, counsel with the Seeger Weiss lawfirm.

A joint-press conference was hosted Wednesday by multiple law firms representing 170 complainants.

"Nothing happened, believe me," Monsignor Paddack told a reporter in March. "I have a 50-year record of teaching. And it's a good record, believe me. I think they're seeing the advertisements on television and in the paper, and a chance to make money. Very sad, and it could ruin a reputation."



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Attorney Bradley Rice, left, will file lawsuits this week on behalf of Staten Island natives James Manfredonia and Bruce Morrison, who claim they were sexually abused by a Staten Island youth sports leader turned AAU coach more than 40 years ago. (Staten Island Advance/Kyle Lawson)

## RENOWNED COACH

One-time Staten Island resident Bruce H. Morrison Sr. has accused Anthony (Tony) Sagona, his former basketball and baseball coach, of sexually molesting him multiple times while he was a teenager.

The allegations were reportedly exclusively by the Advance on Tuesday.

Filed in state Supreme Court, St. George, the suit alleges Sagona abused Morrison over three years starting in 1972. Morrison was between the ages of 13 and 16 then, alleges his civil complaint.

Sagona, a respected AAU basketball figure, coached Morrison in basketball at St. Patrick's Elementary School in Richmond and in baseball in the Great Kills Park, Dutch



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Both organizations are named defendants in the suit as is the Archdiocese of New York.

The complaint alleges Sagona befriended Morrison, who came from a single-parent household and had no father or male role model in his life.

Most of the abuse occurred in Sagona's Great Kills home and involved mutual masturbation and oral sex, the complaint alleges.

Once, after a basketball game in New Jersey, Sagona, who was driving Morrison home, stopped and rented a room in a Garden State hotel, alleges the complaint.

Sagona had Morrison undress and they engaged in "sexual touching and oral sex," the complaint alleges.

Sagona told them their time in the hotel "would be their secret," alleges the complaint.

"Sagona used his positions ... and the power vested in him by the Archdiocese, St. Patrick, Great Kills and Babe Ruth to gain Morrison's trust and confidence and to create opportunities to be alone with and abuse Morrison," the complaint alleges.

The complaint also contends the other defendants negligently allowed Sagona to abuse Morrison.

When contacted about the lawsuit, Sagona said he isn't familiar with the claims and denied the allegations.

"I don't even know where that would come from or what that's about," he said. "It's ridiculous."

Said Bruce Ackerman, Sagona's lawyer: "He's been coaching kids for 40 years. Even just the allegations can ruin (a person's) reputation."

A second plaintiff also alleges in a separate suit that Sagona sexually molested him while coaching him in the Great Kills Babe Ruth League.

James Manfredonia's civil complaint alleges Sagona abused him "in or around 1975" in the basement of the coach's home.

Sagona undressed Manfredonia then masturbated the 13-year-old, alleges the complaint.



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Besides Sagona, the Great Kills Babe Ruth League and the Babe Ruth League Inc. are named defendants.

## **ARCHDIOCESE REACTION**

Joseph Zwilling, the director of communication for the Archdiocese, issued the following statement on Wednesday:"

"The Archdiocese of New York has been anticipating the filing of law suits since the Child Victim's Act passed earlier this year, even as we continue to invite people to consider our successful program to bring compensation quickly to qualified claimants through the archdiocesan Independent Reconciliation and Compensation Program.

"While we carefully review the claims made in these suits, we ask that people pray for peace and healing for all those who have suffered from the sin and crime of the sexual abuse of minors, wherever it occurred, particularly victim-survivors and their families."

## **CLAIMS VS. PARENTS**

One former Staten Islander's alleged abusers are his parents.

The New Jersey resident, who filed the suit as "John Doe," alleges Esther Marie Santisi and Caesar Augustus Nieves sexually abused and battered him for about eight years while he was between the ages of 3 and 11.

The incidents occurred between 1983 and 1991 alleges the plaintiff's civil complaint, filed in state Supreme Court, St. George.

Santisi forced him to take baths with her and pulled and touched his penis and scrotum, alleges the complaint.

Santisi also told him about her sexual activities with men and would force the plaintiff to wait on the floor in the backseat of her car "for extended periods of time" when she had liaisons with men in their apartments in the summer, the complaint contends.

Nieves, for his part, would also force the boy into the bathroom, the complaint alleges.

He would touch his genitals and anus and then stick his fingers in the plaintiff's mouth, alleges the complaint.

Nieves also beat the boy "with sticks and his hands." the complaint maintains.



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The plaintiff said he tried to report the abuse to his school; however, Santisi “brutally beat him and forced him to retract his story” when she learned what he was doing, the complaint alleges.

Besides sexual abuse, the suit alleges civil causes of action for battery, assault, false imprisonment and intentional infliction of emotional distress.

Attempts to reach Santisi by phone and to obtain Nieves’ phone number were not immediately successful.

The plaintiff’s lawyer could not immediately be reached for comment.

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