

Cult Members Indicted for Sexual Assault



Five more men connected with a Jehovah's Witness group in Pennsylvania were charged with sexually assaulting or molesting child victims, some as young as four years old, during an ongoing investigation into the religious cult.

Pennsylvania Attorney General Michelle Henry announced five new suspects in addition to the five men who were indicted in February on various child sex abuse charges. A total of 14 have been identified in total.

Henry said the deviant behavior has gone on for years, and that the "trauma endures for these victims."

The Associated Press reported that critics have said "Jehovah's Witnesses elders have treated child sexual abuse as a sin rather than a crime." The report said that the elders had documented complaints for their internal files but did not report them to authorities.

The report also claims that the church often required a second witness to substantiate a complaint, a "standard that can be impossible to meet when perpetrators often isolate their victims."

All of the suspects taken into custody in the latest round of arrests are 45 and older. One, David Balosa, in his 60s, has yet to be detained and Henry said all of the men had contact with children through the church, sometimes when the family took the person into their home.

The Associated Press reported that one of the victims says she was sexually assaulted 50 or more times between the ages of seven and 12 by a church member "who was 18 when the assaults

began.” Other incidents involved lesser charges of “inappropriate touching.”

Former elder Martin Haugh of York Haven, Pennsylvania, who left the church in 2016 and now advocates for survivors of abuse in the church, lauded law enforcement officials for their investigation and for their arrests. He called Jehovah’s Witness leaders into account saying, “it’s not just a Pennsylvania problem, it’s nationwide.

“I hope elders are arrested who knew about child abuse and covered it up and then it happened again,” said Haugh, who testified to the grand jury about the church’s structure and about his own daughter’s abuse within a Jehovah’s Witnesses congregation.

The AP reported that church spokesman Jarrod Lopes said in a statement the church cannot comment on specific grand jury actions, but that “the news of someone being sexually abused, whether a child or an adult, sickens us.”

“[The church works] to educate and warn parents through our publications, meetings and website about how to protect their children in a variety of circumstances,” Lopes said. “We are also quick to support and offer pastoral care to those affected, while working to ensure that unrepentant perpetrators are removed from the congregation.”

In 2014, a California judge ordered the Jehovah’s Witnesses to pay \$13.5 million to a man who was sexually abused in the 1980s by a church leader. {eo}

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