

## NEWS

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### **Civil Lawsuit Filed Against Ohio Jehovah's Witnesses Congregation and National Organizations by Sexual Abuse Victim**

#### ***Childhood Victim Suffered Sexual Abuse from Congregational Leader Over a Four Year Period***

**Cleveland, OH, July 31, 2013** – The Zalkin Law Firm and Kircher, Arnold & Dame, filed a civil lawsuit today in the Lorain County Common Pleas Court on behalf of a former child member of the West Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses, located in Lorain, OH. The plaintiff, Elizabeth McFarland, was a minor child whose family was active in the congregation at the time of the alleged abuse.

According to the civil complaint, Ms. McFarland was sexually abused as a child by Scott Silvasy, who had served as a "Ministerial Servant", a leadership position in the congregation. Ms. McFarland is now 26 years old and the abuse occurred between 1997 and 2001 at the West Congregation. Silvasy committed suicide on McFarland's birthday in 2003, sometime after McFarland reported the abuse to her parents and other congregational leaders.

At age 14, when McFarland reported this ongoing sexual abuse to her parents and the congregation, the police were never contacted by the congregation, nor were any other protective actions apparently taken by the congregation at that time. The complaint also alleges that the congregation elders were aware that the perpetrator had a prior history of sexual abuse, yet was still allowed to be alone with children in the congregation.

The complaint alleges that the defendants named in the case, the West Congregation, The Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., the Christian Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses, Inc. and un-named other defendants were all negligent in their legal duty to protect the minor child in their care and failed in their duty to prevent the perpetrator, Silvasy, from sexually molesting children. The complaint also alleges that the defendants owed a duty to investigate and not employ the perpetrator and failed to conduct a reasonable investigation of the alleged abuse.

"A place of religion should be a place of complete safety for children," said Irwin Zalkin, of The Zalkin Law Firm, the co-attorney for McFarland. "As an innocent young child, Ms. McFarland had her life ruined by this congregational leader and religious organization, whose actions were compounded by the lack of support she shown by her congregation after courageously bringing to light the shameful actions of a trusted authority figure."

As a result of the abuse, the complaint alleges that Ms. McFarland has suffered great pain and emotional distress that prevented her from the normal enjoyment of life requiring medical and psychological treatment and also that she suffered the loss of earnings and earning capacity. This lawsuit comes on the heels of another lawsuit against the Jehovah's Witnesses filed by The Zalkin Law Firm in California. (See Lopez v. Defendant Doe 1, San Diego Superior Court #37-2012-00099849-CU-PO-CTL; JW, a minor, v. Mountain View Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses et. al. Riverside)

The Zalkin Law Firm is associating in this case with attorney Konrad Kircher of the Ohio law firm of Kircher, Arnold & Dame. The complaint asks for compensatory and punitive damages and costs.

#### **About The Zalkin Law Firm**

With offices in San Diego and New York, The Zalkin Law Firm ([www.zalkin.com](http://www.zalkin.com)) is one of the premier sexual abuse and personal injury law firms in the country. The firm's lawyers have represented hundreds of survivors of childhood sexual abuse and achieved groundbreaking results in numerous high-profile clergy abuse cases across the United States.

The Zalkin Law Firm has aggressively represented hundreds of survivors of child sexual abuse, including former Boy Scouts. The firm has negotiated over \$200 million in settlements in Catholic clergy sex abuse cases.

#### **About Kircher, Arnold & Dame**

With offices in Mason, OH, Kircher, Arnold & Dame (<http://www.kadlaw.com>) represents a broad range of clients including victims of sexual abuse. Konrad Kircher has represented or consulted with over 300 victims of sexual abuse, and has taken four cases to the Ohio Supreme Court since 2005 on behalf of survivors. Konrad and his clients were instrumental in passing the legislation in 2006 which extended the statute of limitations for childhood sexual abuse.

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