

Plaintiff's Attys Hail \$3.5M Settlement In Clergy-Abuse Suit

By **P.J. D'Annunzio**

Law360 (August 9, 2023, 11:13 PM EDT) -- The Archdiocese of Philadelphia has agreed to pay \$3.5 million to settle a lawsuit from a man who alleged a priest sexually assaulted him in 2006 as a 14-year-old attending religious classes at his local parish, the plaintiff's lawyers said Wednesday.

The settlement agreement comes shortly before the case was set to go to trial, addressing claims that the archdiocese was liable for Pastor John Close raping plaintiff J.S. — referred to in court documents by his initials only — after hearing his confession, telling the child it was necessary for his absolution.

Father Close told J.S. the act was necessary to "cleanse" his sins, J.S.'s pretrial memorandum said. "He then threatened the boy to remain silent or else the cleansing would not work and he would suffer eternal damnation. J.S. obeyed and suffered in silence about the rape for years."

David Inscho of Kline & Specter PC represents J.S. and said the archdiocese was to blame for allowing Close to remain in ministry.

The settlement "holds the archdiocese accountable for failing to protect our client and other children," Inscho said in a statement Wednesday. "Through litigation we were able to expose that the archdiocese protected Father Close despite multiple reports of inappropriate behavior with children."

The suit said J.S. has suffered severe psychological repercussions, including issues with substance abuse, and loss of educational, economic and personal opportunities throughout his life.

J.S. further alleged in court papers that the archdiocese knew Close had a history of sexually assaulting children, yet chose to cover it up.

"Despite multiple reports, the archdiocese allowed Close to remain in ministry with access and authority over children," J.S.'s court papers say. "The archdiocese concealed the allegations from families in the parishes where Close was assigned, exposing J.S. and other children to the risk of being abused. Father Close's abuse and the Archdiocese's facilitation of it were part of a larger pattern."

Close died in 2018.

The archdiocese denied any wrongdoing in its pretrial memorandum and claimed bipolar disorder caused inconsistencies in J.S.'s account of the abuse.

"This diagnosis of bipolar disorder, of which Plaintiff has a notable family history, accounts for his varying accounts of this alleged abuse when speaking with different medical providers," the archdiocese's court papers said. "It also explains his reports to providers that he was sexually abused by his mother, physically and emotionally abused by his father, and that his sister was a victim of sexual abuse, and several other statements to medical providers, all of which he now denies."

An attorney for the archdiocese did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

J.S. is represented by Thomas R. Kline, David K. Inscho and Lorraine H. Donnelly of Kline & Specter PC.

The Archdiocese of Philadelphia is represented by Nicholas M. Centrella and Matthew L. Jones of Clark Hill PLC.

The case is J.S. v. Archdiocese of Philadelphia, case number 200102037, in the Philadelphia Court of Common Pleas.

--Editing by Amy French.