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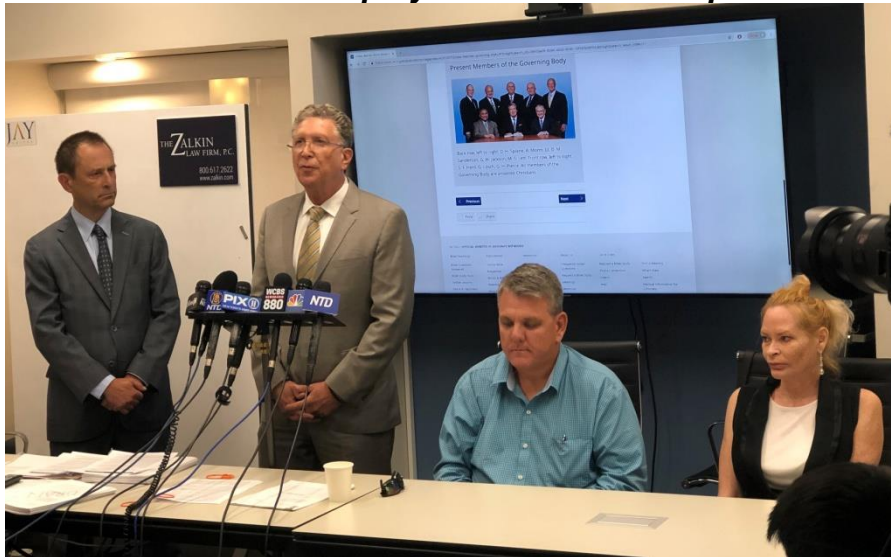
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## **Two Victims of Childhood Sexual Abuse To File Lawsuits Against Jehovah's Witnesses Under New York Child Victim's Act**

*Victims Allege a Culture of Pervasive Child Sexual Abuse  
and Cover Up by Church Leadership*



**New York, NY-** Two childhood sexual abuse victims will file lawsuits August 14<sup>th</sup> in King's County Supreme Court in Brooklyn under the New York Child Victims Act, naming eight members of the Governing Body of the Jehovah's Witnesses (JWs) and other Jehovah's Witnesses entities as defendants.

The Governing Body of the JWs is the equivalent to the Pope within the Catholic Church and establishes all the policies, including those dealing with child sexual abuse reports, that govern decisions by JW Elders and leadership worldwide. The lawsuits will be filed by the Zalkin Law Firm and Barasch McGarry Salzman & Person pursuant to New York's new Child Victims Act, which gives abuse victims additional time to file civil claims under statute of limitations rules.

### **Plaintiff John Michael Ewing**

The lawsuit filed by John Michael Ewing, 48, details how he was allegedly abused by Mike Rust (a known and previously reported child sex abuser) when he was about 14 years old. At the time the alleged abuse began, Rust was a Ministerial Servant, an appointed position within the Jehovah's Witnesses Organization similar to a Deacon in the Catholic Church.

According to the complaint, Ewing was raised as a Jehovah's Witness and attended meetings at the Coral Springs East Congregation in Coral Springs, Florida. The complaint alleges that Rust began grooming Michael in 1985 for approximately 6 months by fondling Michael over his clothes, providing Michael with Victoria Secret type catalogs; then showing Michael pornography.



**Plaintiff John Michael Ewing**

The alleged abuse escalated to many instances of oral and anal sex occurring from 1986-1989. According to the complaint, during this time Rust threatened Michael that he should not say anything because he would get in trouble if he reported the abuse. The alleged abuse ended in late 1989, shortly before Michael's 18th birthday.

The complaint details how at age 21, Michael reported the abuse to his parents. According to the complaint, after the abuse was reported to the JW Elders a judicial committee (religious tribunal) was convened. As a result of this internal committee, both Michael and Rust were "dis-fellowshipped" (excommunicated) for practicing homosexuality. The JW Elders took no action to contact police about the abuse.

"These lawsuits clearly show how The Jehovah's Witnesses are more concerned about protecting their brand than they are the welfare and safety of children," said attorney Irwin Zalkin. "This is an organization cloaked in secrecy and believes that it lives in a parallel universe where it is immune from what it refers to as "Caesar's laws", that is, the law the citizens of this country are required to obey."

#### **Plaintiff Heather Steele:**

The lawsuit filed by Heather Steele, 48, details the long history of alleged molestation of children by a long-time Jehovah's Witness Elder, Donald Nicholson. Heather's family was deeply immersed with the Jehovah's Witnesses, which gave Nicholson the ability to exploit his position as an Elder to gain access to Heather.

Heather was a toddler when the alleged molestations began, and the abuse continued for many years until Nicholson's actions were reported to law enforcement. Although Jehovah's Witness's leaders pressured Heather's family not to cooperate with the criminal investigation, Heather bravely worked with authorities to see that Nicholson was prosecuted and imprisoned.

Nicholson was released after serving three and a half years in New York prisons, then promptly moved to a new town in New Jersey where congregation members did not know about his history of molesting children. He was reinstated as one of Jehovah's Witnesses in 1992.



#### **Plaintiff Heather Steele**

As a result of this extreme and outrageous conduct alleged in these complaints, the Plaintiffs allege severe emotional and psychological damages including severe mental anguish, humiliation and emotional and physical distress. The complaint asks for compensatory and punitive damages and costs.

#### **Background about Jehovah's Witnesses**

While public attention has focused on clergy abuse within the Catholic Church, a serious problem of child sexual abuse within the Jehovah's Witnesses has emerged over the last decade. The World Headquarters of the Jehovah's Witnesses is in Tuxedo Park, N.Y. (formerly in Brooklyn at the building with the big Watchtower sign). The Watchtower (a corporate entity operated by the JWs) has been under investigation internationally, with a Government Royal Commission in Australia issuing a scathing report about child sexual abuse within the JW Organization there. It identified at least 1,800 sexually abused children and 1,000 alleged perpetrators among approximately 68,247 members and 786 congregations.

The Zalkin Law Firm has filed 24 lawsuits around the country on behalf of childhood sexual abuse survivors against the JW Organization. Through these cases the firm has exposed a database maintained by the Service Department of the JWs containing reports and other information about known child molesters within the JW Organization that dates back decades.

The JWs have defied numerous court orders compelling them to produce this database of information in several of the lawsuits.

At least three courts of appeal and the Supreme Court (the highest Court) in California have affirmed the orders of the trial courts for these molestation files to be produced in a usable form with minimal redactions. To this day the JWs have defied these orders. One court of appeal has stated in its published opinion:

"Watchtower has abused the discovery process. It has zealously advocated its position and lost multiple times. Yet, it cavalierly refuses to acknowledge the consequences of these losses and the validity of the court's orders . . . the superior court has shown great patience and flexibility in dealing with a recalcitrant litigant who refuses to follow valid orders and merely reiterates losing arguments." 16 Cal.App.5th at 1271-1272.

**About The Zalkin Law Firm**

With offices in San Diego, CA and New York, NY, the firm's lawyers have represented hundreds of survivors of sexual abuse and sexual assault and achieved results in numerous high-profile sexual abuse and assault cases across the United States. The Zalkin Law Firm has aggressively represented survivors who suffered child sexual abuse and sexual assault while members of religious and other organizations, including the Catholic Church, Jehovah's Witnesses, foster care, Boy Scouts, recovery homes, foreign student exchange programs, colleges. Irwin Zalkin was appointed a lead negotiator by United States Magistrate Judge Leo S. Papas on behalf of over 144 victims of childhood sexual abuse against the Roman Catholic Bishop of San Diego. These negotiations resulted in a global settlement of almost \$200,000,000. He also was one of the lead trial lawyers and part of the trial team against the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Los Angeles where a global settlement was reached in the amount of \$660,000,000.

For more information visit: [www.zalkin.com](http://www.zalkin.com)

**About Barasch McGarry Salzman & Penson**

Barasch McGarry Salzman & Penson is a nationally known personal injury law firm, located in New York, with lawyers who concentrate in catastrophic injury and wrongful death cases arising out of auto accidents, construction accidents, plane, train and motorcycle accidents, and any other case where a serious personal injury was caused by someone's negligence. Many of our clients are NYC firefighters who were injured in the line of duty. We also represent thousands of sick first responders and local residents who are survivors of the 9/11 World Trade Center attacks. For more than 100 collective years, the personal injury attorneys at the New York law firm of Barasch McGarry Salzman & Penson have been seeking justice for victims of personal injury and wrongful death throughout New York and the United States.

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