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Mass. man sues Catholic bishops over sex abuse

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NORTHAMPTON, Mass. -- A Massachusetts man is suing two former bishops of the Springfield, Mass., diocese and another church administrator for allegedly allowing him to be molested by a priest who had admitted to sexually abusing other boys.

Lawyers for the alleged victim say it is perhaps the first U.S. case that involves a defendant who is an accused molester charged with overseeing another accused molester.

Andrew Nicastro, 38, of Williamstown, said the former Rev. Alfred Graves sexually molested him between 1982 and 1984, when Nicastro was 11 to 13 years old. Graves, who has been named as an abuser in other suits filed against the diocese, was suspended from active ministry in the 1990s and officially defrocked by the Vatican in 2006.

The suit names as defendants Bishop Joseph Maguire, who led the Springfield diocese at the time of the allegations, Bishop Thomas Dupre, who was chancellor and third in command, and Richard Sniezyk, who was vicar for priests and had a supervisory role over Graves.

Dupre resigned after he was indicted in 2004 on charges of abusing two boys during the 1970s. The cases were dropped when prosecutors determined they were too old to prosecute. Dupre is currently at a Maryland treatment center for troubled priests.

Mark Dupont, a spokesman for the diocese, said it would be imprudent to comment on the specifics of the case prior to a thorough review.

According to the suit, the parents of a young boy told Maguire in 1976 that their son had been sexually molested by Graves while he was assigned to Our Lady of Hope Church in Springfield. Although Graves admitted to Maguire that he had molested the boy, the bishop merely warned him "to not do it again," the suit states. Graves was subsequently transferred, eventually ending up at St. Patrick's in Williamstown in 1981, where he served as the pastor.

Nicastro's lawyer, John Stobierski, said his investigation has uncovered writings that show Maguire knew about Graves' history of molesting boys.

"For the first time, we have solid proof that the hierarchy of the diocese knew Alfred Graves molested children before he was assigned to a parish where Mr. Nicastro and others were located," he said.

After a barrage of lawsuits earlier this decade, the suit is one of the few civil complaints filed against the diocese in the last four years. The diocese paid out $7.7 million to dozens of claimants in 2004 and another $4.5 million to 59 alleged abuse victims last year. Those costs were offset by an $8.5 million settlement between the diocese and three insurance companies.

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