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Members of SNAP, the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests, including, from left, Kevin Bourgeois, John Gianoli, Richard Windmann and John Anderson, hold signs during a conference in front of the New Orleans Saints training facility, Jan. 29, 2020, in Metairie, La. Officially reversing a controversial March ruling, Louisiana's highest court on Wednesday, June 12, 2024, gave childhood victims of sexual abuse a renewed opportunity to file damage lawsuits. (AP/Matthew Hinton, File)

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New Orleans — June 13, 2024

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Officially reversing a controversial March ruling, Louisiana's highest court Wednesday gave childhood victims of sexual abuse a renewed opportunity to file damage lawsuits.

The state Supreme Court's 5-2 ruling Wednesday upholds a so-called look-back law that was passed in 2021 and amended in 2022. The law gave victims of past abuse, whose deadlines for filing civil lawsuits had expired, renewed opportunities to file lawsuits. The original legislation set a deadline of June 14 of this year. That deadline was later extended until June 2027.

Wednesday's move had been expected. The court had ruled 4-3 in March that the law couldn't stand because it conflicted with due process rights in the state constitution. But the court agreed last month to reconsider the case.

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Justices Scott Crichton and Piper Griffin, part of the majority in March, joined justices joined Chief Justice John Weimer and justices Jay McCallum and William Crain to revive the law.

"For many victims of child sexual abuse, the revival provision represents their first and only opportunity to bring suit," Weimer wrote in the new ruling. "Providing that opportunity to those victims is a legitimate legislative purpose."

Justices James Genovese and Jefferson Hughes dissented. Genovese wrote that the new ruling "obliterates" decades of precedent and "elevates a legislative act over a constitutional right."

The ruling comes as the Catholic Church continues to deal with the ramifications of a decades-old sex scandal. The ruling arose from a case filed against the Catholic Diocese of Lafayette by plaintiffs who said they were molested by a priest in the

1970s while they ranged in age from 8 to 14, according to the Supreme Court record.

Louisiana Attorney General Liz Murrill hailed the court's reversal, as did advocates for abuse victims.