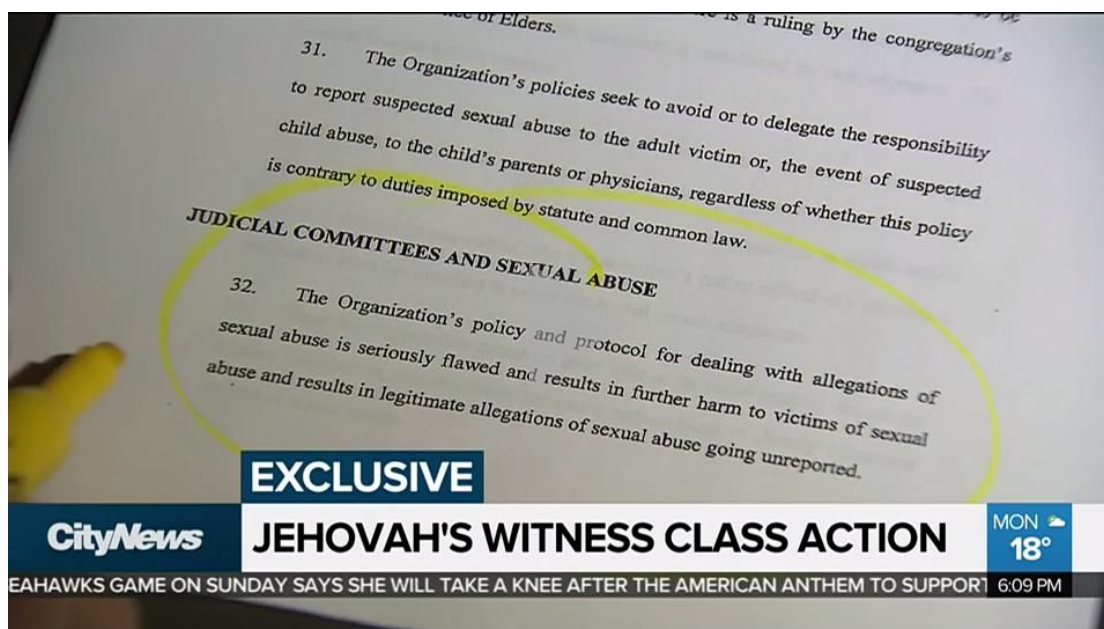


# \$66M class action sex abuse suit filed against Jehovah's Witnesses

BY NEWS STAFF ([HTTP://TORONTO.CITYNEWS.CA/AUTHOR/NEWSSTAFF/](http://toronto.citynews.ca/author/newsstaff/))

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A group of alleged sexual abuse survivors from across the country have filed a \$66-million class action lawsuit against the Jehovah's Witness, CityNews has learned.

The suit accuses the religious organization of having rules and policies that protect child sex abusers and put children at risk.

"The organization's policy and protocol for dealing with allegations of sexual abuse is seriously flawed, and results in further harm to victims of sexual abuse and results in legitimate allegations of sexual abuse going unreported," it alleges.

"This is an issue that the wider community should be concerned with, and not just Jehovah's Witnesses," says Tricia Franginha. She says her first 14 years of life as a Jehovah's Witness were filled with sexual abuse.

"As a result of their procedures, when abuse allegations come forward, these sexual offenders are left at large," Franginha says. "As most people know about Jehovah's Witnesses, they are the ones who come to your door on Saturday mornings, when your kids are home, and for all you know, that person has offended more than once."

None of the allegations in this the suit have been tested in Ontario Superior Court. A spokesperson for the Jehovah's Witness says that while the suit has been filed, the organization hasn't officially received it yet, so they can't comment on the details.

“Jehovah’s Witnesses abhor child abuse and would never shield any perpetrator,” says spokesperson Mattieu Rozon. The organization also says congregation elders comply with child abuse reporting laws.

Franginha says that when she went for help, she was shut down.

“When I was around 12, I was told that I didn’t have two witnesses and I needed to respect my parents – not to talk about it,” she says.

The need to have two witnesses corroborate allegations of abuse is singled out in the suit. People who have been sexually abused must present two credible witnesses to their abuse, explains Franginha, who adds that the eyewitnesses must be other Jehovah’s Witnesses in good standing in the church.

“This, obviously, never happens,” she says. “The very nature of the crime is that it’s secret.”

The suit also alleges that police are not called when allegations surface and instead they’re handled by church elders inside Kingdom Hall.

“It is our information, based on people who contacted us, that the systems in place don’t guard against [abuse] happening, and when allegations are made, inadequate measures are in place to ensure that the complaint reaches the proper authorities,” says Bryan McPhadden, lawyer at McPhadden Samac Tuovi, which is representing the victims.

The victims are seeking \$20 million for damages from sexual and mental abuse by elders, \$20 million for failing to protect children, and another \$20 million for breach of duty of care.

The lawsuit is expected to take years to wind its way through the courts. If you believe you qualify to join the class action suit, you can reach out at [www.mcst.ca](http://www.mcst.ca). ([www.mcst.ca](http://www.mcst.ca))

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