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MONDAY, MARCH 22, 2021

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Salesians face sex abuse suits

5 filed against order that runs Don Bosco Prep

Abbott Koloff NorthJersey.com
USA TODAY NETWORK - NEW JERSEY

At least five sex abuse lawsuits have been filed over the past 15 months against the religious order that runs Don Bosco Preparatory School in Ramsey, a group that has faced a significant num-

ber of accusations in other parts of the country but that so far has received little attention in New Jersey.

The eastern province of the Salesians of Don Bosco, a Catholic order headquartered in New York, has published on its website a list of 40 members who have been credibly accused of abusing

children. At least 22 were assigned to work in New Jersey at some point in their careers, including 10 at Don Bosco Prep.

Most recently, a transgender woman alleged in a lawsuit filed this month that she was sexually assaulted by a religious brother who was her algebra teacher at Don Bosco Prep in the 1970s. The teacher, Michael Brinkman, who now lives at a Salesian residence center

in Florida, had not been included in the order's list of accused brothers.

The accuser, who identified as a boy at the time, was "hysterical and crying" as Brinkman held him down and raped him, according to court filings. Brinkman allegedly "had a reputation for being mean and abusive with students" and disciplined them, "including plain-

See SALESIANS, Page 6A



Nicole Lancaster of North Plainfield earned a master's degree at Montclair State University 10 years ago and has hardly made a dent in her \$40,000 student loan because of interest. CHRIS PEDOTA/NORTHJERSEY.COM

Have student debt in NJ? How the stimulus may help

Stacey Barchenger Trenton Bureau
USA TODAY NETWORK - NEW JERSEY

Nicole Lancaster is not sure which will come first — paying off the student loan she took out to get her master's degree, or retirement.

At 53, with the degree nearly a decade behind her, Lancaster said her \$350 monthly payments have amounted to just a dent in the \$40,000 loan because most has gone toward interest. The North Plainfield grandmother is now part of an army of grassroots activists urging reform, and relief, on student loan debt.

She's watching the debate in Washington, where lawmakers and President Joe Biden are split on who has the power to forgive student loan debt and how much should be forgiven.

About 1.2 million New Jersey residents — one in six adults — have federal student loans outstanding, owing a collective \$40.5 billion, according to the U.S. Department of Education.

More than 879,000 of those individuals could benefit from loan forgiveness, depending on the amount, and — thanks to a section tucked into the

See LOANS, Page 4A

Local experts worried by plateau in virus patients

Lindy Washburn NorthJersey.com
USA TODAY NETWORK - NEW JERSEY

After plummeting in January following the pandemic's second wave, the number of people diagnosed and hospitalized with COVID in New Jersey has stalled at levels far higher than last summer. It's unclear whether this three-week plateau is a prelude to a new wave of the pandemic or a pause on the path to normalcy.

Hospital executives and virus experts are on edge as two trends collide: vaccinations that bring increased immunity and the spread of more contagious variants of the virus that bring more disease.

"In this race between vaccines and variants, we're kind of at a standoff right now," said Daniel Varga, chief physician executive at Hackensack Meridian Health, whose 17 hospitals have treated more than 23,000 COVID patients so far during the pandemic. "The key is to keep doing what we've been doing," in terms of social distancing and mask-wearing, he said, "and wait for the tide to turn."

See PLATEAU, Page 7A

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