

Ex-Providence Catholic president under investigation for alleged sexual abuse of student, police say



A former student at Providence Catholic High School in New Lenox filed a suit against the school and the Augustinian order the oversees it that alleges the school's former president sexually abused him in the mid-1990s, during his freshman and sophomore year. (Zak Koeske / Daily Southtown)

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The former president of Providence Catholic High School in [New Lenox](#), whom police investigated earlier this year for “potentially inappropriate material” on his cell phone, is now under investigation for allegations he sexually abused a male student in the mid-1990s, police said.

New Lenox Police Chief Bob Sterba said Thursday that the department began a criminal investigation into the sexual abuse claims against the Rev. Richard McGrath after the alleged victim came to them in early January.

He said McGrath, through his attorney, had declined to cooperate with authorities for their investigation. When reached for comment Thursday, McGrath’s attorney Patrick Reardon declined comment.

McGrath's alleged victim, 36-year-old Robert Krankvich, of Crest Hill, spoke at a news conference Thursday to announce the filing of a lawsuit that accuses McGrath of abuse and names as defendants Providence Catholic and the Augustinian order that oversees the high school.

"I've decided to come forward because I've been living in shame and in guilt for my entire adult life," Krankvich said Thursday, flanked by his attorneys at the Marriott Residence Inn in downtown Chicago. "I've battled addiction, I've battled suicide — I've tried hurting myself many times — because I can't deal with the pain and all of the shame and the guilt that come forward every day when I think about this."

Krankvich said he finally felt emboldened to tell his story to authorities in January after reading news reports about McGrath's retirement amid the police investigation into the contents of his cell phone.

"I was afraid, terrified," he said. "But I realized, like, I have to do this. I have to do this to give other people a voice. Not just for myself, but for other victims."

"This is necessary. It's necessary for me to process, to move beyond this point in my life and to continue growing as an adult."

Krankvich's father, also named Robert, said he encouraged his son to speak to police after reading about their prior investigation into McGrath's cell phone.

"When it came out about McGrath in January, I seen it," the elder Krankvich said. "I texted him and I said, 'I'm not going to push you, son, but this is an opening. This is a chance for you to come forward and relieve yourself of these demons.'"

"It took him a little while to think about it, but he went ahead and did it."

Sterba said the New Lenox police department had investigated Krankvich's claims to the best of its ability and found him, "very credible during a lengthy interview."

The department submitted its evidence to the Will County state's attorney's office for review about four weeks ago, he said. A spokesman for the state's attorney confirmed that the agency was reviewing the evidence against McGrath, but declined further comment.

Sterba said he did not believe the statute of limitations would pose an impediment to prosecutors should they choose to bring charges in this case.

It's the first time in his 10 years with the department that New Lenox police had received an allegation of abuse regarding McGrath, the chief said. Nonetheless, he encouraged others to come forward if they had information pertaining to additional instances of abuse.

"If there are other victims, we certainly want them to come forward and strongly encourage them to contact us," he said. "Whether there are or whether there aren't, I really can't speak to that. But if there are — and there may

be — please call us.”

Krankvich said his alleged abuse at the hands of McGrath began not long into his freshman year at the private New Lenox high school after the priest approached him in the lunchroom.

“I was a troubled youth, my family had gone through a lot of trouble, and I opened up to him right away,” he said. “He portrayed himself to be a counselor and a figure of authority. I looked up to him. He was the president of the school, he was really fit, he loved football and wrestling, and I looked up to him and wanted to be just like him.”

He alleges in the lawsuit that McGrath abused him repeatedly between ages 13 and 15, and that the abuse happened in McGrath’s office and at the friary where McGrath lived.

Krankvich said he transferred from Providence after his sophomore year, but didn’t tell anyone about the alleged sexual abuse at the time. Instead, he abused drugs and alcohol to cope with the shame, made multiple attempts on his life and questioned his sexuality for years, he said.

“When I got out of high school, I joined the Marine Corps and I should have been this manly man,” he said, “but yet inside I was feeling like a child. Like I was weak and I couldn’t handle anything.

“The only way I knew how to deal with it was to mask my feelings and my hurt with drugs and alcohol.”

Krankvich said he first disclosed the alleged abuse to a therapist about six years ago.

“I had a manic episode where I just couldn’t control anything,” he said. “I told my parents, I checked into the Palos in-patient program. I told all them. I told my psychiatrist at the time. That’s when it all came flooding out.”

He said he thought about coming forward about the alleged abuse at that time, but wasn’t yet at a point in his life where he felt capable of doing so.

“I wasn’t strong enough personally, I wasn’t strong enough in my life,” he said. “I was still battling alcohol and drugs, so I just couldn’t do it. I was afraid (reporters) would be investigating me and questioning my integrity.”

In addition to laying out the abuse claims against McGrath, Krankvich’s suit also alleges the Augustinian order to which McGrath belongs has conspired to conceal the sexual misconduct claims against members of its order and demanded it disclose the identities and histories of Augustinian priests and brothers who have been accused of sexual abuse.

Both Providence Catholic and the Province of Our Mother of Good Counsel, the Augustinian jurisdiction that runs Providence Catholic High School, declined comment on the allegations against McGrath and the religious order, and directed questions to the Diocese of Joliet.

The Diocese released a brief statement Thursday saying it was “saddened to hear about these recent developments,” and that it would cooperate fully as the case proceeds, but could not comment further due to the pending litigation.

McGrath, 71, retired as president of Providence Catholic in late December amid a police investigation into the contents of his cell phone. He had helmed the Augustinian high school as either its principal or president for the past 32 years.

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Before that, he worked for nearly a decade at St. Rita High School on the southwest side of Chicago.

Police reports show that McGrath came under scrutiny by the New Lenox police department after a current Providence student claimed to have seen an inappropriate image on his phone as she approached him from behind as he sat alone on a set of bleachers at a Providence wrestling meet on Dec. 8.

That investigation stalled, however, after McGrath refused to cooperate with police, according to police reports the Daily Southtown obtained in response to a [Freedom of Information Act](#) request.

"The NLPD was advised by Fr. McGrath's legal team that their belief was that the cellular phone did not exist any longer and they believed that it would not surface," a police report states. "Due to the absence of cooperation and lack of further leads this case will be closed."

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