

PRIEST SEX ABUSE

Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston hit with \$10M lawsuit over alleged sex abuse by priest

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<https://abc13.com/sex-assault-lawsuit-priest-father-phi-nguyen-archdiocese-of-galveston-houston/10904531/>

HOUSTON, Texas (KTRK) -- A lawsuit seeking \$10 million has been filed on behalf of two parents who claim their daughter was sexually assaulted by a Catholic priest for the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston.

SNAP, the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests, is calling for immediate action by church officials.

"This lawsuit names the priest, it names Cardinal [Daniel] DiNardo, it names the Vatican and it names the Galveston-Houston diocese because they were the ones responsible for

placing this priest in different places," explained Eduardo Lopez de Casas with SNAP Houston.

The priest accused in the lawsuit is Father Phi Nguyen.

The mother of the alleged victim said it happened in November 2018 when her daughter was 10 years old. She said Nguyen inappropriately touched her daughter during a mock confession.

At the time, the girl was a student at Nazareth Academy in Victoria, Texas.

The lawsuit reads in part:

"Defendant Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston, to include its predecessor, the Diocese of Galveston-Houston and Defendant Cardinal Daniel N. DiNardo and his predecessor, Bishop Fiorenza negligently endorsed, selected, supervised and retained Reverend Phi Thanh Nguyen and assigned him to a position of trust, confidence, and authority in the Diocese of Victoria, including as a cleric and chaplain, and as a mentor, confessor and counselor in direct contact with children. Defendants Archdiocese and Cardinal DiNardo knew or should have

known Father Phi was sexually dangerous to minors and grossly unsuited for such assignments."

Eyewitness News reached out to the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston about the lawsuit.

They responded with the following statement:

"While we have not been served with a new lawsuit and do not ordinarily comment on pending litigation, we do offer the following to clarify public statements that have been made by others:

- The Plaintiff's initial complaint was made to the school located in the Diocese of Victoria, which the minor attended.*
- We have been informed that the initial complaint to school officials in Victoria did not include any allegations of sexual abuse.*

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- We have been informed that the initial complaint to school officials in Victoria did not include any allegations of sexual abuse.*
- When the allegation of sexual abuse was made it was investigated by the police authorities in Victoria and*

no criminal charges were brought against Father Phi Nguyen.

- *The Plaintiff previously filed a lawsuit in Victoria County, which was dismissed without prejudice on their own motion.*

In accordance with current Archdiocesan policies Father Phi Nguyen has been out of ministry since April 2019 when the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston received notification of the sexual abuse allegation."

Meanwhile, Lopez de Casas is calling for immediate action by church officials and has this message for parishioners.

"The parishioners need to understand, when they see Cardinal DiNardo out there saying 'Please give, we need you to give to the DSF fund,' or this or that, they need to understand a lot of that money now is going to attorneys to fight these cases of abuse, and I don't think that's what people want the money to go for in the church," he said.

ABC13 spoke to the accused priest on the phone. He declined an interview and referred us to the archdiocese.

The parents of the alleged victim also issued a statement, saying in part, this assault "set their daughter's life on a completely different path. A destructive one she didn't deserve."

Her mother tells ABC13 she believes Nguyen has more

victims.

Below is the family's full statement:

"Today is a very difficult day for our family, we are grateful and forever indebted to Ms. Peavy and Ms. Merrit for helping us begin the process required to receive justice for our daughter. But it is just that, the beginning of a long battle the Roman Catholic Church continues to use to re-victimize victims of clergy abuse. Victims of clergy abuse do not want to sue the Roman Catholic Church for monetary gain, for us, we want our happy little girl back. We will never know who she would have been had Phi Nguyen not sexually assaulted her at the age of 10. He and the people who enabled him set her life on a completely different path, a destructive one, she didn't deserve. Victims of clergy abuse sue in civil court because we are left no other recourse.

Phi Nguyen is a predator, we do not believe for one second that our daughter is the only child he has violated. We want those victims to know that his shame is not yours to carry. It is okay to speak up, sadly, you are not alone. The Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests (SNAP) has continuously provided great support throughout this entire journey, we are confident that any victims in need of someone to reach out to could contact SNAP for the same support we received."