

# *Ex-Horace Mann Students in Talks on Sex-Abuse Case*

**By Jenny Anderson**

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Thirty-two former students of the Horace Mann School have said they were sexually abused by teachers and staff members, and they have been meeting with school officials in the past two weeks to negotiate compensation, according to a person knowledgeable about the talks.

Last June, an article in The New York Times Magazine recounted episodes of abuse at the school from the 1970s to the 1990s, citing the accounts of several men who had accused former teachers of having sex with them or trying to seduce them.

Since then, more students have come forward to say they had been sexually abused by staff members at Horace Mann, a preparatory school in the Bronx. The 32 students have made accusations against seven or eight former teachers, according to the person familiar with the talks, who did not have authorization to discuss them and thus spoke on the condition of anonymity.

It was unclear how much money was being offered to the students, six of whom have reached agreements with the school.

But another person who has been involved in negotiations — and who says he was abused for several years — said that the amounts were not generous, and that after lawyers' fees, “people will walk away with \$1,000, \$2,000 for years of being abused and raped.”

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During the talks, some victims have recounted for school officials the abuse they said they suffered. The mediation is being managed by Paul Finn, chief executive of Commonwealth Mediation and Conciliation, based in Massachusetts, whose past settlements have included \$85 million for 552 victims in the clergy sexual-abuse scandal in the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Boston.

At least one former student is not satisfied. That student, identified as M., filed suit in Superior Court in Bergen County, N.J., against Horace Mann on Thursday, claiming that Johannes Somary, a music teacher and noted conductor who died in 2011, sexually abused him more than 450 times from 1973 to 1977.

According to the suit, Mr. Somary convinced M. that the boy was his “true love.” It says that M. remained in constant contact — including lunches and dinners, concerts, tennis games and parties at Mr. Somary’s house — until the teacher died. In spite of two marriages and stints in drug rehabilitation, the suit says, M. believed that Mr. Somary was his “soul mate” until he read the Times Magazine article about Horace Mann, which included interviews with M., with a second student who accused Mr. Somary of abuse, and the family of a third, who committed suicide.

“Horace Mann knew or should have known that Somary was a sexual predator,” the suit says.

M.'s lawyer, Rosemarie Arnold, said she hired an economist who estimated that M. was deprived of more than \$21 million in wages and earnings. The suit says he took drugs, including LSD, cocaine and heroin, to “blur the sex.”

Ms. Arnold said M.'s case was unique because much of the abuse happened at the Englewood Boat Basin in New Jersey. New York's statute of limitations require that criminal charges or lawsuits be brought before a victim turns 23, giving most of the Horace Mann victims little leverage in seeking money from the school. In New Jersey, a plaintiff's hurdle is somewhat lower. She said the deadline was two years from the date that the victim knew or should have known that he had been sexually abused; she also said the abuse had to have caused injury.

A spokesman for Horace Mann said on Thursday that the school had no comment on the negotiations or the lawsuit.

Another New York private school, Poly Prep in Brooklyn, settled a lawsuit in December that had been filed by former students who accused the school of covering up decades of sexual abuse by a football coach.

Apart from the lawyers for the school and for the victims, Thomas M. Kelly, the head of Horace Mann, and some board members have been at the negotiating table, according to the person familiar with the talks.

The teachers named in the magazine article are dead, but others accused by former students are not. In July, Tek Young Lin, an English teacher who retired in 1986, told The Times that he had sex with “maybe three” boys while he was there.

In August, the school said that it would work with the New York Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children to review school procedures, train faculty and staff members in identifying and reporting suspected abuse, and develop prevention programs for students. The school also pledged that all of its employees would

undergo a “comprehensive background check.”

Also in August, at least one board member, Joe Rose, helped to set up a charity, the Hilltop Cares Foundation, to raise money for victims of the abuse.

Some victims have wanted more to be done. In an e-mail, M. said: “Horace Mann has shown no remorse whatsoever for the devastation and emotional turmoil that has plagued me throughout my life because of their shameful conduct.”

Robert S. Boynton, a spokesman for the Horace Mann Action Coalition, an alumni group that formed after the publication of the Times Magazine article, said, “We want the same things we always wanted: to acknowledge that abuse took place in unambiguous language, which has not been done; to apologize to the survivors unambiguously; and we want an investigation of some sort, whether with the participation of the school or not. We are not vindictive and we are not out to hurt anyone.”

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