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## **NEWS RELEASE**

### **Second Round of Lawsuits Filed Against New Hanover County Board of Education Over Teacher-Student Sexual Abuse**

*This Time for Allegations Involving Roland Grise  
Middle School Teacher Peter Michael Frank*

Wilmington, NC - Lawyers representing victims of convicted felon and former high school chemistry teacher Michael Earl Kelly have filed another class action lawsuit against the New Hanover County Board of Education – this time on behalf of victims of former Roland Grise Middle School teacher, Peter Michael Frank.

The lawsuit, filed in New Hanover County Superior Court under Case No. 20 CVS 1395, alleges that Frank sexually assaulted and exploited two named plaintiffs while they were students in middle school. It also seeks class action certification on behalf of all of Frank's victims, many of whom were aged 12 to 14 years old at the time and span some two decades.

“Once again, our community faces chilling allegations that another predator was allowed to lurk within our schools for years preying on innocent young lives,” said Joel Rhine, of the Rhine Law Firm, P.C., one of the firms handling the cases.

Frank was arrested in January on 12 counts of taking indecent liberties – 6 involving indecent liberties and 6 indecent liberties with students. Then, in March, Frank was indicted on another 17 charges involving crimes he committed on a single student.

“At this point, the community is well aware of the allegations involving the mishandling of investigations and the lack of discipline and ownership taken with respect to preventing teacher-student sexual abuse by school administrators. The time has come for the Board of Education to step up and acknowledge its commitment to its mission of providing a *safe and positive* learning

environment for students, as is stated in Board Policy 1100,” added Martin Ramey, another attorney with the Rhine Law Firm.

“Set aside for one moment the liability issues associated with whether the Board or its administrators had prior knowledge of any of this. We are happy to litigate that in court. What everyone, including the Board should be focusing on – because the injuries are real – there will be no dispute of that – is helping the victims of both the Kelly and Frank cases who are hurting and will continue to hurt for the rest of their lives,” Rhine adds.

"One of the many unfortunate consequences of the School Board's conduct, is that with each denial they make, they force the victims to relive their trauma. We are going to look back years from now and remember this is the time that we ended the culture that allowed children to be abused," stated Ryan Schultz, a partner at The Lea/Schultz Law Firm, from another one of the firms handling this case.

Victims in both suits argue that it is time for the Board to acknowledge their injuries and to consider addressing how best to assist the victims with the counseling and assistance that they need. “But the real reason these folks are suing is that they demand the Board change its policies and ensure that these kinds of acts never happen again in our schools. It’s time for the Board to take the lead and become a model for other school districts rather than serve as the poster child for permissiveness,” says Ramey.

Since filing of the complaint against Kelly in July of 2015, Assistant Superintendent Rick Holliday, Superintendent Tim Markley, General Counsel Wayne Bullard and Assistant Superintendent and Head of Human Resources John Whelmers have all resigned voluntarily from their posts. “The Board has added additional resources to its efforts to combat school assaults and Title IX violations, but more could be done and must,” says Rhine.

"If the School Board will not assist in the healing of these victims and our community, we will be ready to litigate if they choose that route,” added Jim Lea, managing partner of Lea/Schultz.

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The Rhine Law Firm, P.C. is a local litigation firm with a national practice. The firm routinely represents clients in complex litigation including class actions, institutional sex abuse, multi-party litigation, construction defect litigation and personal injury and wrongful death cases.

The Lea/Schultz Law Firm, P.C is a litigation-based law firm located in Wilmington. Lea/Schultz has been featured in *U.S News and World Reports*, Best Lawyers in America and Super Lawyers. Lea/Schultz have been interviewed by local and national news outlets, and both Jim Lea and Ryan Schultz have spoken at numerous events and symposiums.

In July of 2019, the firms filed a class action lawsuit against the school board on behalf of victims of the former teacher Michael E. Kelly. Kelly was convicted in June 2019 of some 59 felony counts arising out of a 20+-year history of assaults of young male students at Isaac Bear Early College

High School and Laney High School, both in Wilmington. For more information on this litigation, see [www.nhcssexualabuselawsuit.com](http://www.nhcssexualabuselawsuit.com).

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Attorneys would ask members of the press to provide the following resources to victims of sexual assaults and abuse:

- [National Sexual Assault Hotline](#), tel.: 1-800-656-HOPE (4673). This group connects victims of sexual assaults to sexual assault service providers in their community.
- [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#), tel. : 1-800-273-8255. This group provides 24/7, free and confidential support for people in distress, prevention and crisis resources.

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