

Wilmington law firms representing victims of sexual abuse in New Hanover schools investigating potential civil suit

By **Benjamin Schachtman** - July 9, 2019



Two Wilmington-based law firms are investigating potential civil claims by victims who suffered sexual abuse by employees of the New Hanover County (Ferebee)

WILMINGTON — A Wilmington-based law firm representing several of “victims of sexual abuse that occurred at local New Hanover County schools” is conducting an independent investigation to determine

whether the employers of Michael Earl Kelly, former teacher and convicted sex offender, should be held responsible in civil court.

Related: [Former students, parents say they reported teacher misconduct to Holliday, board members, up to 20 years ago](#)

According to a joint release from the Rhine Law Firm and The Lea/Schultz Law Firm, “Our firms represent several victims of sexual abuse that occurred at local New Hanover County Schools within the last two decades. The most recent reports follow the sentencing of former science teacher Mike Kelly to as many as 31 years on multiple charges by a New Hanover County Superior Court Judge. Over the years, Kelly taught at local high schools including Laney High and Isaac Bear Early College High School.”

The law firms are “working diligently to conduct an independent civil investigation into the facts, one separate from that being conducted by law enforcement and/or the school system,” the release states.

“Our focus is on whether anyone employing Kelly knew of his behavior and should bear any responsibility within our civil justice system to our clients. Because our investigation is ongoing, we have asked our clients to refrain from making public comment on the issues until such time as we can reach a conclusion to our investigation,” according to the release.

The law firms also noted that victims continue to come forward, asking the public and the media to respect their privacy.

The release also asked the media to share the following “helpful resources on sexual abuse and assault to assist individuals who have been victimized sexually by others.”

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

Send comments and tips to Benjamin Schachtman at ben@localvoicemedia.com, [@pcdben](https://twitter.com/pcdben) on Twitter, and (910) 538-2001

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