



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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NEWS RELEASE

ADDITIONAL VICTIMS SUE NEW HANOVER COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION OVER MICHAEL KELLY'S SEXUAL ASSAULTS

Attorneys for the Plaintiffs Respond to the Board's Statement Regarding the Litigation

Wilmington, NC – Three additional victims have emerged to tell their stories of sexual abuse and misconduct at the hands of former teacher and convicted felon Michael Kelly within New Hanover County Schools. Ranging in ages from 17 to 23, the victims allege that Kelly engaged in sexually inappropriate discussions and conduct with them, including one with whom Kelly performed a sexual act while videotaping it.

They join other Kelly victims who filed suit on July 23, 2019 in New Hanover County Superior Court, in the case of *John Does 1 to 3 v. The New Hanover County Board of Education*, et al., Case No. 19 CVS 2745.

On Thursday of last week, New Hanover County Board of Education (“Board”) Chairperson Lisa Estep declined comment on the pending litigation and expressed “sympathy for any student who *may* have been harmed by Michael Kelly.”

“Make no mistake about it. Once again, the Board has missed the point,” said Joel Rhine of Rhine Law Firm, P.C., one of the attorneys filing the case. “Just like the students of Richard Priode and other instructors dating back to the late 1990s, these students were permanently harmed by Kelly’s actions and by the complicity of the Board and school officials. There is nothing imaginary or suspect about their injuries.”

“No child deserves to be treated as a sexual object by any of his or her teachers, not to mention any adult. Period,” adds Jim Lea of The Lea/Schultz Law Firm, P.C., who also represents victims. “We understand that the Board cannot comment on pending litigation, but it could have come

forward with affirmative and proactive steps to prevent this from happening again and ensure that students at Isaac Bear and other schools understand how to report sexual assaults instead of the Board's tepid response."

"Where are the discussions with students and parents about the resources offered by New Hanover County Schools in responding to sexual assaults by teachers, by other students, by strangers?" questions Rhine. "Where are the victims advocates, counselors, reporting resources, and help for these students in our schools?"

Both lawyers admit that the course of the litigation will determine the Board's liability for Kelly's past actions, to which he has pleaded guilty. "It is just a shame though that while this is going on, the Board still remains defensive and cannot seem to deploy the resources necessary to help its current students or reach out and come to the table," adds Rhine.

"There are many students and victims who remain in our schools, particularly at Isaac Bear who have not come forward. They are hiding behind anonymity to prevent their parents and friends from learning what happened to them. They hide in fear of shame and humiliation and need assistance in identifying safe alternatives for them to talk about what happened. As parents, we all should be demanding that our Board take better care of its students than be concerned about issuing a statement drafted by its lawyers to prevent admissions of wrongdoing," said Lea.

"Step up. Face the challenge. Put our students and our children first and make sure that they get the help that they need. Become a leading model for high schools everywhere on how to prevent sexual assaults in school. Train teachers how to report concerns. Put into place reporting hotlines and other resources. Monitor your computers and access to inappropriate sites. Bring in professionals who deal with this type of abuse," concludes Rhine.

Since announcing their investigation into the suits and abuse by Kelly, both Lea and Rhine have asked reporters to publish helpful resources on sexual abuse and assault to assist individuals who have been victimized sexually by others. These include the following resources:

- [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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