

Boy Scout files reveal legacy of abuse

By **Martine Powers, Liam F. O'Kennedy and Zachary T. Sampson** | GLOBE STAFF AND GLOBE CORRESPONDENTS OCTOBER 20, 2012

The alleged abuse happened on camping trips, in tents and trailers, inside sleeping bags. Boys from Cape Cod to the Berkshires, granted the privilege of sleeping beside one of their revered Scout leaders, were touched, grabbed, fondled in the night.

Again and again, a top Boy Scouts' official delivered an identical, two-sentence response to letters from district council leaders outlining the offenses: "Thank you for the detailed information concerning the above Scouter. We have reviewed this case with our attorney and have now placed this man on the Confidential File."

Documents released this week under a court order paint a devastating picture of thousands of episodes of abuse, dozens in Massachusetts, that occurred on Scout-organized outings from about 1965 to 1985.

In Massachusetts, some accused leaders were terminated from their posts swiftly, sometimes weeks after allegations of inappropriate contact arose.

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The Boy Scouts of America have maintained that the "perversion list," which was accessible only to scout officials at the national council, helped them protect boys when accused abusers tried to apply for leadership positions within other troops.

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But child advocates and prosecutors said the Boy Scouts' secret file of abusers allowed scoutmasters with a history of hurting children to leave unscathed, barred from Boy Scout troops, but free to interact with children in other settings, in other cities.

“He can go anywhere else in the country — a Boys’ Club, a Pop Warner league, a soccer camp, teaching somewhere — and nobody knows,” said Boston attorney Carmen L. Durso, who represents victims of child sexual abuse.

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authorities at the time.’*

“And if nobody knows about it, they’re just going to give them more access to kids,” said Durso.

The documents, which the Boy Scouts of America fought to keep sealed, were released Thursday by an Oregon legal team under an order from the Oregon Supreme Court.

The files list about 1,200 alleged child molesters nationally, with at least 45 in Massachusetts.

Their deeds often went unreported to law enforcement authorities.

“It’s bothersome that people didn’t [contact] the authorities at the time that they discovered these incidents had occurred,” Berkshire District Attorney David F. Capeless said.

One case in 1982 involved a 30-year-old Scout leader in Needham whose “outstanding characteristics and interests” included “fish fly-making and fishing.”

On a camping trip during the first weekend in February, he invited three boys into his tent to drink alcohol and sleep overnight, according to a letter written by a district council executive.

Though it was cold, he encouraged the boys to sleep in only their underwear.

In the middle of the night, one boy awoke to the scout leader performing oral sex on him.

In a different case, on Memorial Day weekend 1976, a 21-year-old North Adams Scout leader invited one boy to join him inside his trailer during a Memorial Weekend camping trip, according to the files.

The Scout leader, recently graduated from being a Scout himself, told the boy he wanted to “give him a rubdown,” according to the letter filed by another district

executive.

The boy protested, but when the Scout leader attempted to scramble onto his bunk, the boy allowed the leader to pull down his underwear and fondle him.

The Scout leader asked to have the same thing done to him, and the boy refused.

In many cases, Scout leaders resigned, citing “moral reasons,” once confronted by supervisors about the accusations made against them.

In other instances, men tried to rejoin the Scouting community after a hiatus, though they were routinely denied.

Paul Hightower of Dorchester attended seminary for 10 months, later facing accusations that he abused two children while studying to become a priest.

After leaving the seminary, the files show, Hightower became a Scout leader, but was barred in 1971 after he allegedly assaulted a Scout on a Thompson Island camping trip. He asked to be allowed back into Scouting, though he said he accepted that he would never again be a scoutmaster.

He solicited a letter of support from his therapist after marrying.

“Although Paul had many problems which in the past would have made it inadvisable for him to pursue such an activity,” the social worker wrote in a letter, “I feel that the emotional growth which has taken place in him over the past two years as a result of his therapy and his marriage leave me feeling confident that he will be able to make an important contribution in the Scouting field.”

Hightower died in 1994.

In some cases, scoutmasters were flagged in Boy Scouts files only after they were convicted of sexual abuse and news of their wrongdoing was reported.

Deron Smith, national spokesman for the Boy Scouts of America, said the organization keeps a list of ineligible volunteers and works closely with law enforcement when abuse is reported.

“There are cases in there that we believe were handled inappropriately, but you’re looking at a different era,” he said. “Today we take a multitiered approach to keeping

kids safe.”

Smith said the Scouts now require national criminal background checks from all prospective adult leaders, and a Scout leader is never allowed to be alone with a boy.

Mark Nelson of Kingston, the Scout executive of the Annawon Council, learned of the files when he began working for the Scouts as a district executive in 1985 while in Arizona.

“It’s one tool in an arsenal to protect our youth,” he said. “Its main purpose has been to keep track of individuals that could not meet our standards of membership, or we’d be concerned with them being involved with youth.”

Matthew Fogelman, an attorney who represents victims of childhood sexual abuse, said Friday that the Boy Scouts erred by failing to make public the files on alleged abusers.

Fogelman said the publication of those cases would have hastened changes to Boy Scout regulations, including the rule that adult leaders may not sleep alone in a tent with a boy, that may have prevented later abuse.

“I’m not saying that the Boy Scouts should be abolished,” Fogelman said. “But if the idea is to prevent other people from being injured or abused, you need more information than less information for that to happen.”

Though much time has passed since the incidents covered in the perversion files occurred, Capeless said his office could possibly prosecute offenders through exceptions to the statute of limitations, but only if a victim came forward.

“I would be loath to resurrect a situation like this unless a victim wanted that,” Capeless said in an interview Friday.

“I don’t think it’s my place to bring this up again, only to find out that someone didn’t want that and to retraumatize them,” he said.

In separate statements, Attorney General Martha Coakley, Middlesex District Attorney Gerard T. Leone Jr., and Suffolk District Attorney Daniel F. Conley all condemned the Boy Scouts’ use of a secret database of abusers.

“The last thing that adults should do, whether individually or as part of an

organization, is suppress the disclosure of that abuse if they know of it or even suspect it,” Conley said.

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