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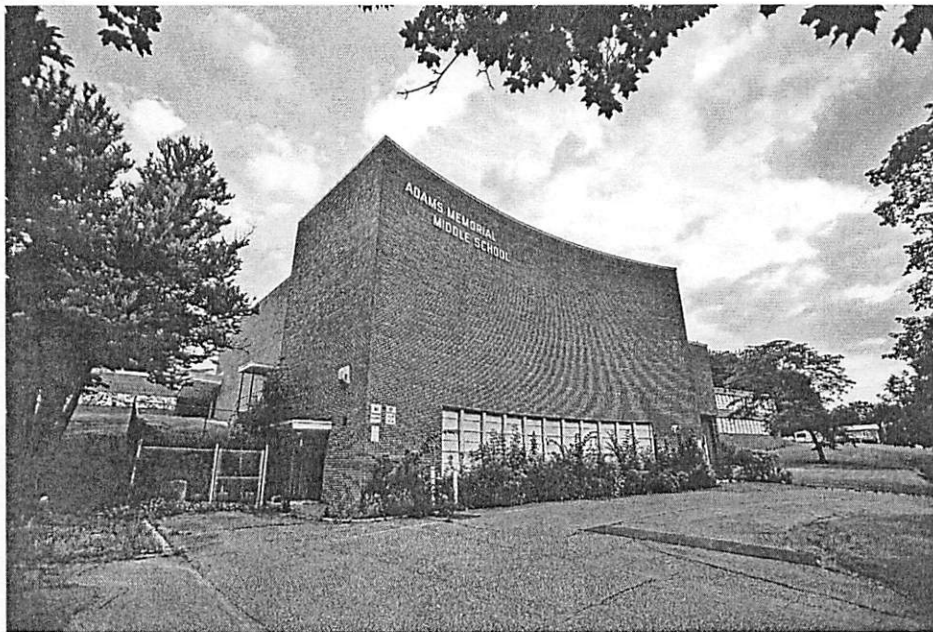
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## Adams-Cheshire School Committee to investigate new claims of sexual abuse in '70s



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The former Adams Memorial Middle School was the site of numerous alleged sexual assaults by a former custodian in the 1970s when it was the Adams Junior High School. The Adams-Cheshire School Committee has opened a new investigation into the claims.

EAGLE FILE

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By Bob Dunn, [bdunn@berkshireeagle.com](mailto:bdunn@berkshireeagle.com) (mailto:bdunn@berkshireeagle.com)

ADAMS — The Adams-Cheshire Regional School District will investigate an unspecified number of new claims from former students alleging they were sexually assaulted by a school custodian in the 1970s.

"The district is now investigating these additional claims and will treat every person who has and who will come forward with dignity and confidentiality," according to a statement released by the committee on Monday night following an hour-long discussion in executive session.

The attorney who first brought the first two claims of abuse to the district said he was disappointed by the lack of apology contained within that statement.

Two men, both in their 50s, last year brought their claims of molestation by Clement St. Hilaire to the School Committee, which, in turn, had those claims investigated.

That investigation, which did not include interviews with the two victims, concluded there was an "absence of proof" to support the claims, according to a January 2017 public statement from the district.

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Following the publication of an Eagle investigation in mid-August (<http://www.berkshireeagle.com/stories/dark-secrets-surface-two-boys-now-men-claim->

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abuse-by-school-custodian-in-the-1970s,517228?), more than 15 men have come forward with claims they were also victims of similar assaults by St. Hilaire between 1970 and October 1976, when, according to district records, he resigned.  
St. Hilaire said he was forced from his job after reports of abuse were made to the school administration.

In its statement, the district said it was contacted via letter in early 2016 by attorney Matthew Fogelman, representing the first two men to bring their assault claims forward.

"That letter also threatened a suit would be filed unless certain demands were met. In response, the district hired an attorney experienced in handling claims of sexual abuse," committee Chairman Paul Butler said.

In the earlier investigation, the committee brought in former attorney Michael K. Callan, now a Hampden Superior Court judge, to investigate the charges.

During Monday's meeting, Butler said the district has now hired Springfield-based attorney Nancy Frankel Pelletier to head up the new query.

A message left with Frankel Pelletier was not immediately returned.

Fogelman, who represents the two men who first brought their claims to the school district and then The Eagle, was frustrated by the district's response.

"The District's latest statement, much like their January statement, is underwhelming and disappointing," Fogelman said in an email. "Crucially absent from the statement is any acknowledgment that their prior claim regarding a lack of evidence of abuse proved incorrect."

"The continued lack of a simple apology is glaring," he said. "How difficult is it to utter two basic words? 'We're sorry.'"

"For some unknown reason, they cannot bring themselves to act compassionately, be decent, apologize, offer to pay for counseling," Fogelman said. "What these men are asking for, in actuality, is very little."

On Monday night, Butler did not have available the total cost of Callan's investigation.

He said the hourly rate charged by Callan was \$225, which is the same rate the district will be paying Frankel Pelletier.

A message left with Superintendent Robert Putnam on Tuesday seeking the total cost of Callan's investigation was not immediately returned.

Butler said no details about the new claims would be provided due to the confidential nature of the information.

St. Hilaire, who is now in his 90s and living in Adams, stepped down from his custodian job days after three sets of parents reported assaults against their children to the late Jack Gallivan, who was the principal of the former Adams Memorial Junior High School, where the assaults allegedly occurred.

The men who have made claims of abuse said St. Hilaire would routinely hire and pay students as custodial assistants to do light cleaning after school and on weekends.

The men said St. Hilaire would expose them to pornography and would get them alone in various parts of the building and molest them.

The claims were brought to the attention of the Berkshire District Attorney's Office and the Adams Police Department around 2008, but no criminal charges were filed against St. Hilaire due to the expiration of the statute of limitations.

Despite that expiration, Adams police did tell one of the claimants that St. Hilaire was going to be informed of the complaint of sexual abuse against him.

In an Eagle interview at his home in January, St. Hilaire acknowledged assaulting the two men when they were students, but insisted they were the only two. He said it must have been one of them who reported the assaults which led to his being forced to resign.

Neither of the men who brought their claims to The Eagle revealed their respective assaults until well into adulthood. One of the additional victims to come forward since, Michael Donovan, has said he reported the abuse. His mother, Barbara Donovan, has said when she met with Gallivan in 1976 to report this abuse, there were two other sets of parents at the same meeting.

In his statement, Fogelman articulated the type of response he was hoping the district would have made by now, regarding the matter.

"I will continue to call upon the District to do the right thing, but my voice is getting hoarse," Fogelman said.

Reach staff writer Bob Dunn at 413-496-6249 or @BobDunn413 on Twitter.

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