

Rhode Island's "Look-Back" Window for Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse Has Expanded: What Every Organization and Institution Needs to Know Before July 1

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On July 1, 2026, Rhode Island will join more than half of the states in expanding a “look-back” window for survivors of childhood sexual abuse to include a more defined pool of potential parties¹. By temporarily suspending the statute of limitations for these claims, the legislation offers those who suffered trauma decades ago a chance to seek justice against a perpetrator and any other party that may have had some level of involvement in the claims—regardless of how much time has passed.

Under the amended statute of limitations, organizations and institutions that may be defined as a “party” could face claims against them that would have otherwise been time barred under the original statute (to be commenced by no later than June 30, 2028). (See FN 1). In many instances, these claims involve potential witnesses and perpetrators that are no longer available and, in some cases, deceased. Revival windows, though well-intentioned, have often produced significant practical and legal challenges that can undermine the very justice they seek to deliver.

New York’s 2019 Child Victims Act triggered a massive influx of cases—more than 10,783 filed between 2019 and 2021². As of 2025, however, just over 2,000 of those lawsuits had been settled or resolved³. That leaves more than 8,000 survivors still waiting for their “day in court.” By way of example, Rhode Island has over 10 times **fewer** justices than New York⁴ and only four Superior courts spread out across the Ocean State. This calls into question whether such a smaller court system is equipped to handle the potential of a similar flood of claims without compromising other cases and court operations.

In an effort to streamline the litigation that is placing a strain on court resources, for example, California courts have consolidated large groups of claims against the same institution into coordinated proceedings to improve litigation efficiency⁵. Though such measures can prevent duplicative litigation, they can also shift focus from individual claimants to broad institutional battles.

In some instances, institutions and organizations facing waves of revived claims or adverse verdicts have turned to bankruptcy protection, leading to prolonged restructuring processes as well as the establishment of victim compensation trusts, a result that is far from ideal for any involved party⁶.

As Rhode Island expands its “look-back” window, organizations, institutions, schools, religious entities, and other potential defendants face a complex and high-stakes wave of revived childhood sexual abuse claims. Though the law seeks to deliver justice for survivors of childhood sexual abuse, the practical realities – overburdened courts, witness and evidentiary challenges due to the passage of time, mass consolidation of cases, and the real risk of bankruptcy-level exposure—demand proactive and sophisticated defense strategies.

Institutions and organizations that act early with representation from experienced counsel are far better positioned to protect their interests, manage risk, and achieve favorable resolutions. The defense of institutions and organizations

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facing such claims require attorneys that understand the unique dynamics of revived childhood abuse claims, coordinated proceedings, issues related to insurance coverage, as well as the difficult negotiations that often determine outcomes. Accordingly, it is extremely important for institutions and organizations to be prepared to handle any potential claims now, so that they may navigate the challenges ahead.

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¹ R.I Gen Laws §9-1-51 (2025) as amended.

<https://webserver.rilegislature.gov/Billtext/BillText26/SenateText26/S2616A.htm>

² Corky Siemaszko, "Most of the New York Child Victims Act Lawsuits Remain in Limbo Five Years Later" *NBC News*, May 9, 2025, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/new-york-child-victims-act-lawsuits-remain-limbo-five-years-later-rcna204133>

³ Siemaszko, "Most of the New York Child Victims Act Lawsuits Remain in Limbo Five Years Later" <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/new-york-child-victims-act-lawsuits-remain-limbo-five-years-later-rcna204133>

⁴ Rhode Island Department of State "Superior Court," Directory of Government Officials, accessed June 16, 2026, <https://opengov.sos.ri.gov/GOVDirectoryPublic/OpenGovDirectoryOfficials?topmenuId=105&EntityID=3424&page=DetailCourt>

⁵ Ronald V. Miller, Jr., "California Category Archives," *Lawsuit Information Center*, accessed June 12, 2026, <https://www.lawsuit-information-center.com/california-sexual-abuse-lawsuits-and-settlements.html>

⁶ Jillian Ruck, "Bankruptcy and Child Sex Abuse: Where We've Been and Where We're Going," *Child USA*, October 12, 2023, <https://childusa.org/bankruptcy-and-csa/>