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## 340 people file claims against Archdiocese of Santa Fe

By Rebecca Moss | [rmoss@sfnewmexican.com](mailto:rmoss@sfnewmexican.com) Jun 17, 2019 Updated Jun 17, 2019

The window is now closed for survivors of alleged sexual abuse by New Mexico's Roman Catholic clergy to seek a financial settlement against the Archdiocese of Santa Fe.

According to court records, 340 people filed claims against the church as of the 5 p.m. Monday deadline. Although most claims are sealed, attorneys say the overwhelming majority relate to allegations of sexual molestation and assault by priests and deacons who worked in the archdiocese.

At least 78 clergy members have been "credibly accused" of sexually abusing children, according to a list released by the Archdiocese of Santa Fe last year. In December 2018, the archdiocese said the number of abuse claims against the church could be financially devastating and required it to seek bankruptcy protection.

The deadline marks the beginning of a negotiation process between the archdiocese and a creditors committee to agree on a remedy for those who have filed claims and a plan moving forward. The bankruptcy process could also reveal other perpetrators not yet named by the archdiocese, but that is at the discretion of the court.

"The numbers are really high, but there is only proof when people come forward," Diana Abeyta, a Santa Fe advocate said prior to the deadline. "In the last several months, it has been just sadness, lots of disappointment."

Attorneys for alleged abuse victims say Monday's tally is likely well below the true number of survivors. A handful of these claims are non-abuse related, alleging accidents, employment discrimination or other wrongdoing by the archdiocese.

"We have always thought there are probably 1,500 or 2,500" abuse survivors, said Brad Hall, an Albuquerque lawyer who has handled many cases against the archdiocese. "When you factor in how many have moved away, or passed away, [with] how many suicides there have been ... it is very possible there are many people" who won't be accounted for by the deadline.

Hall said his office alone has settled hundreds of claims with the church since the early 1990s. And most individuals, particularly men, don't feel ready to come forward until at least their 30s and others only when they are much older, Hall said.

As a result, any child who may have been abused since the late 1990s but has not come forward will be unable to file a civil lawsuit against the archdiocese.

## **Rebecca Moss**

Reporter

Rebecca Moss has covered the environment and Los Alamos National Laboratory for the Santa Fe New Mexican since 2015. In 2018, she was selected to participate in the ProPublica Local Reporting Network.