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## Nearly 300 sue over alleged sexual abuse at L.A. County juvenile halls and camps



A lawsuit details alleged assaults, dating from the 1970s through 2018, that spanned a wide swath of L.A. County's once vast and now mostly shuttered juvenile hall system. Above, the Barry J. Nidorf Juvenile Hall in Los Angeles. (Brian van der Brug / Los Angeles Times)

BY RICHARD WINTON | STAFF WRITER

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For five decades, boys and girls in Los Angeles County juvenile camps and detention halls have suffered repeated sexual assaults at the hands of probation and detention officers, according to a lawsuit filed by nearly 300 former detainees.

Page after page of the 359-page lawsuit filed Dec. 20 details allegations of systemic failures and horrific scenes of sexual abuse that lawyers say went unchecked by the L.A. County Probation Department, which operates the camps and halls.

Attorneys for the 279 plaintiffs say some of the boys and girls were victimized by more than one officer, and some officers are accused of being serial abusers, repeatedly finding new victims among those sent to the facilities over the years.

The lawsuit states that not only were the plaintiffs minors, but they also were incarcerated, which marks the abuse under the “color of authority.”

The alleged assaults, dating from the 1970s through 2018, spanned a wide swath of L.A. County’s once-vast and now mostly closed juvenile hall system, including [Camp Scott](#) and [Camp Kenyon Scudder](#) — girls facilities; the [Challenger Memorial Youth Center](#); and the [Los Padrinos, Central and Barry J. Nidorf juvenile halls](#).

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County officials did not immediately respond to requests for comment.



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March 9, 2022

The latest suit follows two [lawsuits filed earlier](#) this year in which [70 women said they were sexually assaulted](#) at Camp Scott and other probation facilities. It alleges that detention officers not only abused teenage girls, but also raped boys, and in some cases, female staff forced the same boys into sex acts.

One man said that in 2004, when he was 17, he was forced to commit sex acts regularly with both a male and a female probation officer at Nidorf Juvenile Hall in Sylmar.

The man, who is now 35 and is identified as John TG Roe in the lawsuit, told The Times he recalls the male officer taking him into a separate cell to sexually abuse him and repeatedly warning him, “You better not say a word to anyone.”

The lawsuit alleges he was repeatedly raped during his time at the hall.

“On those long days, he just kept on coming,” TG Roe said of the male officer, his voice quavering with emotion. “How could you do that to somebody?”

The female probation officer repeatedly promised Roe “she was going to help him get out, but don’t tell nobody,” he said, adding that she slipped him gifts such as a hairbrush and other hard-to-get items. He said that as a teen from South Los Angeles, he thought at the time he was alone, but he now knows there are hundreds of other accusers.

“The county has essentially created a safe haven in which these abusers have been able to hunt ... victims in a closed environment much like a bird in a cage,” said the lead attorney in the litigation, Douglas Rochen of the ACTS firm. “The fact that it has gone on for as long as it has, despite all of the complaints and knowledge, whether actual or constructive by the county, is a testament to a system that has failed.”



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The lawsuit comes amid a window created by a 2020 state law that opened a rare three-year period for individuals to sue over sexual abuse claims from decades ago. The law effectively pauses California’s statute of limitations, enabling suits for civil damages to be filed. After 2022, people can file civil suits if the alleged incidents are less than 40 years old or if it has been five years since plaintiffs encountered psychological effects from alleged past sexual abuse.

Even before the latest lawsuit, L.A. County Supervisor Janice Hahn called the accusations “stomach-turning.”

“The officers responsible for this abuse need to be held accountable,” she said. “They have no business working for the county, and they should face criminal charges.”

The county Probation Oversight Commission was already planning a hearing that would allow accusers to testify anonymously.

Esché Jackson, the commission’s vice chair who was incarcerated in Central, Padrinos and Nidorf for two years as a youth, said at a recent hearing that the abuse allegations hit close to home as she knew girls victimized by those meant to protect them.

“The latest allegations of sexual abuse against female minors in probation custody bring new meaning to the notion that what happens in the dark must come to light,” she said.

The lawsuit alleges that probation officers threatened girls with punishment or dangled rewards, including an early release from detention, if they performed sexual acts.

Jane PS Roe said in the suit that in 1999, when she was 15, a probation officer identified as James Petty groped her repeatedly in his office at Camp Scott and sometimes handcuffed her to the chair so she could not resist his attacks. He sent her to “the hole” if she resisted, she said, which happened four or five times, according to documents filed the suit.

When she returned to Scott later as a platoon leader, Petty told her that to keep her privileges, she would need to perform oral sex on him, PS Roe said in the lawsuit. The woman, now 38, said other girls watched the forced abuse on two occasions and she reported it to a nurse, teachers and cooks but was ignored.

Petty was identified as a perpetrator in the earlier lawsuits as well.



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Aug. 19, 2022

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The allegations are not limited to decades past. One woman said in the lawsuit that in 2018, when she was 16 and pregnant, she was left behind when everyone went to eat. She said she began kicking the door but an unidentified officer “came in and started groping her breasts ... and buttock while smiling, suggesting it was for her own sexual gratification.

Some also allege in the suit that they were abused by different officers at different facilities.

Jane CR Roe said in court documents that she was abused by two different probation officers between 1995 and 1997, when she was 15 to 17 years old.

The lawsuits are not the first to allege abusive conditions inside local juvenile detention facilities. A multiyear U.S. Department of Justice investigation found that staff frequently used “excessive force” — including [overuse of pepper spray](#) by staff — and that detained youth were not provided adequate mental health treatments or programming. The county was put under federal oversight for six years, with monitoring of the facilities [ending in 2015](#).

County juvenile custody facilities have come under heavy state scrutiny in recent years.

A 2010 investigation by The Times found that at least 11 L.A. County juvenile probation officers had been [convicted of crimes](#) or disciplined for inappropriate conduct involving current or former probationers, including several cases of molesting or beating youths in their care. There were 102 allegations of officer misconduct involving youths at the county’s juvenile halls and camps from 2007 through 2010.

In 2018, a [\\$1-million settlement](#) was approved in a lawsuit involving former probation officer Oscar David Calderon Jr., who was sentenced to one year in county jail in 2017 after [pleading guilty](#) to two felony counts of assault under the color of authority for “inappropriately touching” two girls at Camp Scudder.

In 2020, county officials [approved the eventual dismantling](#) of the county’s juvenile probation system in favor of a new agency that would focus on emotional support, counseling and treatment.

In January 2021, the [county reached a settlement agreement](#) with the California attorney general’s office to improve conditions at juvenile facilities after a state probe found that detention officers



unnecessarily used pepper spray; confined minors in cells for long periods, forcing them to [urinate into milk cartons](#); and prevented them from receiving medical care and attending classes.

Another lawsuit by eight women detained as minors who alleged sexual abuse at the camps was settled this year for a little under \$1 million.

In November, a state corrections board decided that the county's juvenile halls were "suitable" to house youths after [previous inspections](#) had placed the facilities in danger of closing.

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