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Sex Abuse Lawsuits Against the Washington Department of Children, Youth and Families

by **Ronald V. Miller, Jr.**

On this page, we will look at negligence sex abuse lawsuits brought against the state of Washington's Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) for failing to protect children from sexual and physical abuse. Minors who were abused after being placed by DSHS in foster care, residential treatment centers, or other facilities, can file a civil lawsuit against DSHS and get financial compensation.

If you have a potential sex abuse lawsuit against DCYF, contact our **Washington sexual abuse lawyers** today at **800-553-8082** or get a **free online consultation**. Our attorneys will fight to get you the overdue compensation that you deserve.

About DCYF

The Washington Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) is the state agency in Washington responsible for services and programs related to child welfare, juvenile rehabilitation, early learning, and child protective services. DCYF's mission focuses on promoting the well-being of children, youth, and families while working to ensure safety and equity in service delivery.

DCYF was created in 2018. Prior to 2018, the child welfare responsibilities now handled by DCYF were the handled by the Washington Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS).

Providing child welfare services is one of the primary functions of DCYF. DCYF is responsible for investigating cases of child abuse or neglect. If DCYF determines that a child is being abused, harmed or grossly neglected, they have the authority to legally remove the child from their home. Once a child is removed from their home and the custody of their parent(s) or legal guardian, DCYF assumes legal responsibility for the care of that child.

Children who are in the custody and care of DCYF are typically placed in foster care. DCYF is responsible for screening and supervising foster homes to ensure that they are safe environments for children.

DCYF is also the state agency that is responsible for providing correctional and rehabilitative “treatment” and other services to minors involved in the juvenile justice system. Juveniles who are adjudicated for criminal offenses and sentenced to detention or some type of treatment become the responsibility of DCYF.

DCYF oversees the operation of some state facilities for juvenile correction and treatment. DCYF also outsources this function by placing juveniles in secure residential treatment facilities operated by private companies.

Sex Abuse Lawsuits Against DCYF

DCYF has a legal duty to take all reasonable measures to ensure that children and juvenile delinquents under its care and supervision are kept reasonably safe from sexual abuse and assault. This means that DCYF is legally obligated to make sure that they aren’t placing foster care children or juvenile detainees in settings where they may be victims of abuse.

So what exactly does this duty require? At a minimum, it requires DCYF to make a reasonable effort to properly screen and investigate foster parents and/or residential treatment facilities before placing minors in their custody. If DCYF is negligent in performing this duty, they can be held liable in a civil lawsuit.

Unfortunately, recent investigations and lawsuits have revealed that DCYF has been grossly negligent when it comes to ensuring the safety of children and juveniles under its care. DCFY has been negligent in a number of key ways:

Failure to Screen: DCFY has negligently failed to screen the backgrounds of foster parents and treatment facilities.

Failure to Monitor: DCFY routinely neglects to properly monitor and supervise foster parents and residential treatment facilities for juveniles.

Failure to Investigate: DCFY fails to investigate complaints about sexual abuse of children and juvenile delinquents.

Any minor who was the victim of sexual assault or abuse when they were placed in foster care or sent to a treatment facility can file a civil lawsuit against DCFY and get financial compensation.

Statute of Limitations for Child Sex Abuse Lawsuits in Washington

In 2024, Washington enacted a **new law** to provide survivors of childhood sexual abuse greater access to justice through expanded opportunities to file lawsuits.

For cases involving abuse occurring on or after June 6, 2024, the law removes all time restrictions, allowing survivors to file claims at any point in their lives. This significant change reflects a growing recognition of the long-lasting and often delayed effects of childhood sexual abuse, which can take years—or even decades—for survivors to process and address legally.

Additionally, the law clarifies that survivors do not need to pinpoint which specific act in a pattern of abuse caused their injuries. Instead, they can use the date of the most recent incident as part of a continuing scheme of abuse for filing purposes. It also ensures that the knowledge of a parent or guardian is not cruelly imputed to a minor survivor, safeguarding the child’s right to pursue justice independently of their caregiver’s awareness of the sexual abuse.

For cases where the abuse occurred before June 2024, victims' claims are subject to the general 3-year SOL in Washington. Under this law, victims have until their 21st birthday, or 3 years from when they first "discover" that they were injured or "understand" that they were injured by acts of sexual abuse, whichever is later. **RCW § 4.16.340.**

Settlements and Verdicts Against DCFY and DSHS

Below are verdicts and reported settlements in sexual abuse lawsuits against DSHS and DCFY.

\$2,850,000 Settlement: DSHS agreed to pay \$2.8 million to settle claims by a group of victims who claimed that they were sexually abused at juvenile residential treatment facilities that they were sent to. The lawsuit alleged that DSHS ignored clear warnings about abuse and failed to investigate allegations of abuse of juveniles at the facility.

\$2,000,000 Settlement: In this case, DCFY was accused of negligently placing a child in a foster home when one of the foster parents was a known sexual predator. Not surprisingly, the child was repeatedly sexually assaulted after being placed in the foster home. The lawsuit accused DCFY and DSHS of negligently failing to perform background checks on foster parents and failing to properly supervise.

\$3,500,000 Settlement: In this high profile case, DSHS was accused of negligently placing a 3 year old girl in a foster home despite being aware of numerous reports of alleged sexual abuse of child at the home. The girl claimed that she was sexually abused by her foster father from age 3 to 16 and sexually trafficked in Washington apple orchards.

\$1,875,000 Settlement: In this case, DSHS was accused of negligently failing to investigate allegations of child abuse. The plaintiff claimed that DSHS was aware of numerous complaints that his father was abusing him and his siblings, but did not take appropriate action and remove them from the home. The plaintiff alleged that he was sexually abused by his father for years.

\$689,000 Verdict: Despite many warnings received from multiple sources, including local law enforcement that the plaintiff was the victim of sexual abuse at her home, DSHS did nothing to protect the plaintiff by removing her and sent her back to the home. She eventually escaped after being held essentially captive and sexually abused for many years.

\$3,000,000 Settlement: The plaintiff's grandmother filed a formal complaint with DSHS alleging that she was being sexually abused by her grandfather. A court ordered DSHS to investigate the allegation, but DSHS never followed up. The plaintiff sued for negligence after suffering years of sexual abuse.

Contact Us About DCFY Sex Abuse Lawsuits

We are accepting sexual abuse cases against Washington DCFY. **Contact us online** or call us at **800-553-8082**.
Posted in: **Sex Abuse** and **Washington**

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