News



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A nonprofit serving women who are deaf in Montreal is asking courts to allow a class-action lawsuit on behalf of more than 40 of its members who say they were sexually, physically and psychologically abused at a school for the deaf run by sisters.

La Maison des Femmes Sourdes de Montréal (The House of Deaf Women of Montreal) on June 9 filed its request for class-action status in its suit against the Daughters of Charity, Servants of the Poor — known as the Sisters of Providence — who ran l'Institut des Sourdes-Muettes de Montréal (Institute of the Deaf and Dumb of Montreal). The sisters ran the boarding school from 1851, just eight years after the order was founded, until 1975, when the Canadian government took over the Quebec education system, according to the document.

The court filing, which is in French, details the allegations of one woman, who is not named, to represent what it says are similar experiences of more than 40 other members of La Maison des Femmes Sourdes de Montréal. It alleges the woman was abused from about the age of 6 until she was about 10 but does not say what years that time period covered.

The document names four sisters accused of abusing the girl; at least one of the four has died. It does not appear criminal charges have been filed.

A spokesperson for the Sisters of Providence in Montreal declined to comment.

The woman alleges she was regularly abused sexually by two sisters and occasionally by two others, sometimes with a statue of the Virgin Mary. She also alleges psychological abuse, such as being forced to kiss the mouth of a deceased sister. She said when she confided the abuse to a novice, one of the sisters dragged her to the furnace and threatened to throw her in. She describes children being pushed down stairs and a forced haircut that resulted in a child's ear being cut off.

The filing says the woman's time at the boarding school was "hell on earth" and that the sexual abuse continued until she told a priest who believed her accounts. The sexual abuse decreased from that point on, it says, but the physical violence continued unabated.

The woman still suffers from the trauma, the document alleges, and as a child, she feared she would become a lesbian because of the abuse and contemplated suicide.

La Maison des Femmes Sourdes de Montréal is represented by the law firm of Trudel Johnston & Lespérance.

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