

## **Kansas City police say they received molestation allegation against retired Wyoming bishop**

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[https://trib.com/news/state-and-regional/crime-and-courts/kansas-city-police-say-they-received-molestation-allegation-against-retired/article\\_e045a56c-5ddd-5f1f-807b-a2aa10e6f0ea.html](https://trib.com/news/state-and-regional/crime-and-courts/kansas-city-police-say-they-received-molestation-allegation-against-retired/article_e045a56c-5ddd-5f1f-807b-a2aa10e6f0ea.html)

[PHOTO: Bishop Joseph Hart is shown in an undated photo from the Casper Star-Tribune archive. Hart served as bishop or auxiliary bishop of the Diocese of Cheyenne from 1976 to 2001. He spent 20 years as a priest in Kansas City before coming to Wyoming.]

Kansas City police took a report in August alleging that retired Wyoming Bishop Joseph Hart molested a teenage boy in Missouri in 1974, a spokesman for the department said Wednesday.

Unlike Wyoming, Missouri has a statute of limitations, so police and the local prosecutor could not proceed with the report. Kansas City Police Capt. Tim Hernandez said he didn't know if the complaint was made by the victim — now a 59-year-old man — or by someone else with knowledge of the alleged abuse.

"There were no charges, and the case was not followed up on because of the statute of limitations," Hernandez said.

He said the report alleged that Hart molested the victim in spring or summer 1974. The victim would have been 14 or 15 years old then. Hart served as a priest in Kansas City, his hometown, until 1976, when he moved to Wyoming to become auxiliary and later full bishop. The police captain also said the August report was the only such criminal report made to his department against Hart that he could find.

Hart has previously stated that he has never abused anyone and denied all of the allegations against him. His Wyoming defense attorney, Tom Jubin, has previously denied the allegations as well. A message sent to Jubin was not returned Wednesday; the attorney has not returned repeated calls and messages over the past three months.

Hart spent nearly five decades as a priest or bishop, first in Kansas City, then in Casper, and finally in Cheyenne. He has been publicly accused of sexual abuse by at least 18 men; all of those men's allegations have been deemed credible by various church institutions. The Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph has settled lawsuits with 10 of Hart's victims, and it has fielded allegations of abuse in Missouri by two male victims over the past year. One of those victims declined to proceed with a diocese investigation, however.

The Diocese of Cheyenne has said over the past two years that it has substantiated the claims of six men who accused Hart of abusing them in Wyoming. The Wyoming diocese has declined to say whether it has settled lawsuits with any of Hart's victims here.

At least two Wyoming victims who say they were abused here are Missouri residents, according to a spokesman for the Kansas City diocese. For years, Hart has been alleged to have abused boys who were taken on trips with him to Wyoming and around the West.

While Missouri has a statute of limitations, Wyoming has no such barrier to prosecution. Indeed, Cheyenne police announced in August that they were recommending charges against two men in relation to clergy abuse from the 1970s and 1980s. Police declined to name either man, but information released by the police department indicates one of the men is Hart. The understanding of those on the periphery of the investigation is that Hart is indeed one of the men facing charges.

The Star-Tribune previously reported that any charges made against Hart would be leveled by the Natrona County District Attorney. Casper's top prosecutor, Dan Itzen, has taken over the case because of a conflict of interest within the Laramie County District Attorney's office.

It's been more than three months since police recommended charges be filed against Hart. A Cheyenne police spokesman said he wasn't sure why prosecutors hadn't made a decision yet and that he had expected an announcement to have happened sooner. Others close to one of Hart's Wyoming victims have also expressed frustration about the delay.

Itzen previously declined to comment on whether he was handling the case. He has also declined to comment further, citing Wyoming statute. The Laramie County prosecutor, Leigh Anne Manlove, has not returned previous requests for comment.

If Hart is indeed charged, he will become the highest-ranking Catholic cleric in U.S. history to face criminal prosecution for sexual abuse. Hart is in his late 80s and currently lives in diocese housing in Cheyenne. He is still a member of the priesthood, though a Vatican investigation that is also in the works could lead him to be defrocked.