

Contact: Gloria Allred
Phone: 323-653-6530
Email: gallred@amglaw.com

STATEMENT OF ATTORNEY GLORIA ALLRED REGARDING UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA

Today we are here to discuss seven lawsuits that we have filed on behalf of former students of the University of North Carolina School of the Arts related to allegations of childhood sexual abuse and exploitation each suffered while a minor attending that school. These victims can seek justice because of the compassion and understanding of the North Carolina General Assembly in passing the SAFE Child Act. In November 2019, Governor Cooper signed the Safe Child Act into law after this historic piece of legislation – perhaps the most important victim’s rights legislation in decades -- was approved by a bipartisan unanimous vote in both the NC Senate and House. This unanimous bipartisan vote came at a time when North Carolina was sharply divided by partisan politics. Despite those divisions, every legislator rallied behind the SAFE Child Act.

One of the many important things the bill did was to give victims who were sexually abused as children in North Carolina whose claims were time barred by the expiration of the statute of limitations a window called a Claw Back window in which their claims have been revived.

That window closes on December 31, 2021. This means that victims have until this year to file their claims that were previously barred by the running of the

statute of limitations. It is important to us and to our clients that victims, especially victims of the NCSA, know of this deadline.

We also are here today in hopes that when the public becomes fully aware of these claims that witnesses will come forward to support the allegations made by the alleged victims we represent.

Last week we filed in the Industrial Commission lawsuits on behalf of seven victims alleging that for at least two decades the administrators at the UNCSA knew of the culture of sexual abuse and exploitation of children under their care and supervision but did nothing to stop that egregious conduct. Those claims are filed under the North Carolina Tort Claims Act.

We also filed in Forsyth County Superior court a lawsuit on behalf of our clients against both the University North Carolina School of the Arts (UNCSA) and individually against seven former UNCSA administrators and one former teacher at the school. The claims against the administrators seek to hold them personally responsible for knowing about the widespread sexual abuse of students at the school and yet failing to take any steps to protect our clients and others.

The claims against UNCSA in that case are based on allegations that UNCSA violated the North Carolina Constitution in permitting and condoning the widely known sexual abuse of students.

This lawsuit is filed as a class action and brings these claims not only on behalf of our seven clients but also on behalf of all other current and former students who may have been victims of sexual abuse.

The allegations in these lawsuits are both serious and troubling. For example, we allege the following:

The complaint alleges that students were groped, fondled and touched in a sexual manner and that students were constantly subjected to grossly sexual comments.

The complaint further alleges that sexual abuse and exploitation inflicted upon minor students at the school was not only known by students, faculty, staff, and administrators at the school, but sadly was known among many of the members of the dance community nationwide.

The complaint further alleges that the culture of condoning sexual abuse was not limited to the dance department, but also occurred in the Drama and Film Departments, and that the University ignored and/or condoned it.

Some graduate students in the film school were also involved in the abuse.

The complaint further alleges that sexual relationships between faculty members and high school age students were widely known by UNCSA administrators who ignored and/or condoned such sexual exploitation.

We contend in the lawsuit that Defendant UNCSA knew or should have known of the repeated and ongoing sexual abuse and exploitation of UNCSA's students and despite this knowledge acted with deliberate indifference and failed to report, intervene, investigate, discipline, pursue criminal charges, stop the abuse and exploitation or otherwise take any action to protect the Plaintiffs and other students at UNCSA.

Our clients who allege in this lawsuit that they are victims are very brave. They look forward to testifying in court and having the truth come out regarding what happened to them when they were young middle and high school age students at UNCSA. All they want is justice and for everyone to know that students have access to justice to assert and vindicate their rights thanks to the SAFE Child Act. This Act was signed into law for the protection of victims who were minors in North Carolina when their rights were violated and gave all such victims of childhood sexual abuse – no matter their current age – two years to seek justice against their abusers and their enablers – a chance at justice that they thought was long gone. But this provision of the Act expires on December 31, 2021. That means that adults who allege they were a victim of sexual abuse as a child must file their lawsuit in North Carolina no later than December 31, 2021.

Thanks to the Safe Child Act there can finally be justice for these victims. We urge anyone who has information that may be helpful in our investigation to contact us.

Attorney Gloria Allred
Representing Seven Former Students of UNCSA
With Co-counsel Lanier Law Group
October 4, 2021