

\$16M settlement OK'd between New Rochelle's Christian Brothers, sex abuse victims

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A federal judge has approved a \$16 million settlement brokered between sex-abuse victims and the New Rochelle-based Christian Brothers Institute.

The settlement was first agreed to in May. Judge Robert Drain's order on Monday in U.S. Bankruptcy Court in White Plains means the settlement is now binding on all parties, including the Christian Brothers' debtors, the group said in a statement.

Abuse victims voted in recent weeks to unanimously approve the settlement, which was developed jointly by lawyers for the more than 400 victims, the Christian Brothers and the group's debtors.

"We apologize for the difficulties that abuse survivors and their families have endured," Brothers Hugh O'Neill and Kevin Griffith, the leaders of the group's North American and Latin American region, said in a statement. "We have reached out and met with a number of survivors of abuse to apologize and express our sorrow in person."

A lawyer for the victims could not be reached for comment.

Drain's approval of the settlement came as part of a larger approval of a reorganization plan for the Christian Brothers, a nonprofit corporation that sought federal bankruptcy protection in 2011 in the face of the claims. The institute said then that it had about \$63 million in assets against many more millions in potential liabilities.

Under the terms approved by Drain, debtors will pay \$13.5 million to fund a trust that will be used to pay victims. An additional \$3.2 million will be funded by an insurer, while the rest will come from the sale of certain real estate assets.

The Christian Brothers founded Iona College in 1940, but the institution has been self-owned and self-governed since 1947. They are not involved in the settlement.

Part of the settlement includes an independent audit of personnel records to make public any other records of abuse. The brothers also agreed to a "comprehensive zero-tolerance initiative" in connection with any future abuses.

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