



Presentation High School Sexual Abuse

Not words, but deeds

An internal investigation has revealed decades of [sexual abuse at Presentation High School](#) and a cover-up by top school administrators. For everyone involved in holding Presentation High School accountable and making the school safer for students, the report vindicates victims, survivors, and their supporters. All of them endured attacks on their credibility and motives for more than two years.

The [sexual abuse legal team](#) at Corsiglia, McMahon & Allard first got involved in November of 2017. The email arrived on November 1, 2017, from Cheryl Hodgkin Marshall. She wanted to talk to us about a sexual abuse cover-up that had taken place over 20+ years at Presentation High School. She said that finding out that numerous girls had been harmed pushed her over the edge. Cheryl is not a victim but rather someone who, since high school, has stood up for sexual abuse victims silenced by those who should be protecting them.

"Cheryl used her voice to be an advocate for sexual abuse victims," attorney Robert Allard said. "Instead of watching, Cheryl acted on *not words, but deeds.*"

Kathryn Leehane, the author of the [Washington Post piece](#), started to receive calls from fellow PHS alumnae. She immediately called and we agreed to work on the case pro bono. All three of us decided that those that enabled sexual abuse must go and that future PHS students must be protected so that nothing like this ever happens.

From the onset, it was clear that Mary Miller was covering up for predators. "Miller outright intimidated victims of sex abuse, telling one victim that the "walls have ears" and that they had better be prepared to face "libel" charges if they persisted," Allard said.



The law, at that point, was favoring Presentation High School. Due to their cover-up, victims were unable to sue for their abuse. We continued none the less, working with Kathryn and Cheryl to ensure the safety of PHS students.

We immediately put former San Jose Police Detective and [sex crimes investigator Mike Leininger](#) to work. He began interviewing sexual abuse victims and teachers who had left the school due to Mary Miller's handling of sexual abuse complaints and others who provided valuable information.

Within three days, we had enough credible information to implicate at least five teachers, and an unmistakable pattern emerged of how PHS dealt with these situations. Something had to be done.

"I think the culture at the school led by the administration was suppressive," Allard said.

We learned that a teacher left the school because of the way the Kristopher White matter was handled. The school sent a private investigator to her home. She said he was aggressive, dismissive, and felt that he had already made his decision.

How have Presentation administrators going back to at least the late 1980s fared in its legal duty to protect students entrusted to its care from predator teachers and coaches?

The answer is that they utterly failed. Through their actions, young women were not only unprotected, but the school went to great lengths to cover up specific information that it possessed concerning predator teachers and coaches.

On November 22, 2017, Cheryl and Kathryn publicly exposed decades of sexual abuse at Presentation High School.

Instead of taking responsibility, the school issued a statement that said, "PHS strongly disputes the claims made today by a San Jose personal injury attorney that we have not acted properly in handling of reporting allegations of inappropriate behavior in the history of our school since 1962." And, "When PHS has been alerted by students to instances of inappropriate behavior, we have investigated and taken appropriate action, both internally and externally."



As victims and supporters continued to pressure the school, the school turned around in February in 2018 and hired a crisis management consultant by the name of Sam Singer to handle its communications.

There is an excellent timeline created at the [Make Pres Safe](#) website by Leehane.

As a result of relentless pressure by Leehane, Hodgkin Marshall, and countless alumnae, Presentation slowly began to change. In May of 2018, PHS Board Chair Marian Stuckey announced her retirement.

In August of 2018, a PHS sexual abuse victim brought forth the first lawsuit against the school and Mary Miller. And in September, Mary Miller announced that she was resigning. One year later, the school announced that it was conducting an external investigation, which was released on July 9, 2020.

Change happens when people speak up, get involved, and are committed to justice.

Leehane took her message to the community, presenting, *The Accidental Advocate: Protecting Our Children from Sexual Abuse* at the Rotary Club of San Jose.

Finally, many times institutions cover up sexual abuse to protect their image and reputation. It is the news media that can influence institutional change through their reporting. NBC11's Vicky Nguyen and Michael Bott were instrumental in keeping the issue alive and helping to effect positive change.