

State high court puts time limit on victims to sue their abusers

Associated Press

SPRINGFIELD — The state Supreme Court made it harder Friday for victims of childhood sexual abuse to sue their abusers years later.

The court held that abuse victims generally must file any lawsuits within two years of turning 18. It rejected the argument that the two-year clock should begin running only when a victim discovers the earlier abuse is the cause of psychological problems as an adult.

Lyn Schollett, staff attorney for the Illinois Coalition Against Sexual Assault, said the ruling shows the high court does not understand the repercussions of abuse.

"We spend a lot of our time doing education about the lifelong impact of childhood sexual abuse, so it's very disheartening to see the Supreme Court undermining that message," Schollett said.

The ruling involves Teresa Clay's

claim that Brother Richard Kuhl, a member of the Roman Catholic Society of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart, abused her hundreds of times. She says the abuse lasted seven years, ending about the time she was 16.

Clay says she has always remembered the abuse, and the court's ruling does not involve repressed memories. Her argument was that she did not realize until her early 30s that the abuse was the cause of her psychological problems.

Clay argues the statute of limitations should start running once she realized the abuse had injured her, much as someone exposed to asbestos years ago could sue after being diagnosed with asbestosis.

Her attorney, Joseph Klest, said children often are abused by people they trust who teach them the sexual contact is normal. Only years later do the victims reject that attitude and realize they have been harmed, he said.