

Horace Mann Survivors' Second Letter

July 11, 2012

To: The Horace Mann School Board of Trustees and Dr. Thomas Kelly, Head of School
Cc: The Horace Mann Community
From: The Horace Mann Survivors' Group

We are more than twenty people who were sexually abused at Horace Mann. Our group includes both women and men. Those members of our group who tragically took their lives are represented by close family members. The abuse included heterosexual and homosexual violation. Our abusers include more than ten teachers and coaches, many of whom have not yet been publicly identified. Some of these abusers are still alive and living comfortable lives.

Three weeks have passed since we presented a letter to the Board of Trustees, and we have still received no response. We have received no acknowledgment of our letter, nor any indication of when or whether we will ever receive a personal response. We have received no gesture of compassion or caring from the Board of Trustees.

In our first letter, presented to Dr. Kelly on June 20 and to the Board on June 21, we sought to open a constructive dialogue with the Trustees and Administration to find solutions good for the school and for us. So far the Trustees appear to be stonewalling us. Some of us have had informal, private conversations with Dr. Kelly. His tone has been reasonably constructive, but he has not told us he is responding to our letter on behalf of the Trustees. We have received inquiries from the school's lawyers, but this is not the same as hearing from the Trustees. We have heard from the school's PR firm through the news media, but this is not the same as hearing from the Trustees.

It seems to us that the Trustees must do one of two things. The first alternative would be to give Dr. Kelly full authority to make decisions and to act on the issues we raised and the requests we made in our first letter. The second, if the Trustees insist on making all decisions themselves, is for them to respond to our letter immediately and to agree to meet promptly with us face-to-face.

The Trustees have an opportunity to create a win-win situation, and we hope they will seize it. They can demonstrate the school's integrity by bringing an end to Horace Mann's long history of covering up abuse. We brought many of our stories to school officials from the 1970s through the 2000s. In most cases nothing at all was done, and our abusers were allowed to continue their abuse. In some cases school officials – including both Administration officials and Trustees – urged us to keep silent or even bullied us into silence. We believe that some of these Trustees are still members of the Board. To our knowledge, no one reported these events to Child Protective Services or law enforcement. In one case a student who was being sexually abused was asked to meet with the Guidance Department Chairman, only to be sexually abused by that Chairman and then to have that Chairman take retaliatory action against the victim in the classroom. We encourage the Trustees to put an end to this sad tradition.

We do not want to harm our alma mater. Most of us love Horace Mann and are proud to have studied there. But we have been pressured to be silent too many times. The Trustees can no longer ignore us or delay their response. If the Trustees are unwilling to respond to us, instead continuing to communicate with us only through their lawyers and their PR firm, then they – not we – will have done serious harm to the school.

If the Trustees give full authority to Dr. Kelly to make decisions and act on the requests in our first letter, then that would give more substance to our current conversations with Dr. Kelly. But if the Board of Trustees insist that only they may make the decisions regarding what to do about the abuse we suffered, then they must respond to us directly and meet with us.

Sincerely,

The Horace Mann Survivors' Group