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## Lawsuits are first under new state law

By MARY K. REINHART  
TRIBUNE

A Chandler legal team filed civil lawsuits Wednesday against a convicted child killer and a child molester, the first under a new state law that extends the statute of limitations in certain civil cases.

Attorneys for the Never Again Foundation are suing on behalf of a woman whose severely disabled 6-year-old son was killed in 1983 and a woman whose stepfather sexually abused her in the 1980s.

In the past, the right to sue expired two years after the crime. The new law freezes the civil statute of limitations during criminal prosecution and gives victims one year after conviction to file suit, regardless of how long ago the

crime occurred.

"He has not even begun to pay his debt," Joyce Lefler, the boy's mother, said of convicted murderer Harley Spencer. "It's like a tribute to my little son, who never had a chance to defend himself."

Although both offenders are serving lengthy prison terms, successful lawsuits could allow their victims to recover monetary damages long after the men are released. The civil suit in the boy's death seeks \$20 million in damages, and the suit in the molestation case seeks \$6 million.

"The theme of what we did today is not about the money," said Mesa attorney Kent Phelps. "It's about sending the message that if you abuse ... for the rest of your life, you

will have a financial millstone around your neck. You will never have financial freedom. It's basically a life sentence."

The law, which passed earlier this year, was sponsored by Rep. Warde Nichols, R-Chandler.

Victims may be discouraged from filing suit for fear of jeopardizing the criminal case, said attorney Keith Perkins.

"What we are trying to do is to allow the criminal justice system to work," said Perkins. "When they go to jail, they're paying their debt to society. But they have still left the victim financially devastated."

Lefler was initially accused of killing her son, but charges were dropped. Her then-9-year-old daughter, however, was removed by Child Protective Services and placed with

her father in Mesa. In addition to losing both of her children, Lefler lost her job and her home. Glendale police reopened the case in 2001 and Spencer, the boy's babysitter, was convicted in his death and sentenced to 18 years.

In the molestation case, Sherry Alldredge was sexually and physically abused by her stepfather until she left home at age 17. She went on to become a police officer in Texas, but child abuse training with the police department prompted her to report Edmund Nichols to Phoenix police.

Nichols reached a plea agreement in May and is serving a 17-year sentence.

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