

2003 Senate Bill 207

Date of enactment: **April 19, 2004**  
Date of publication\*: **April 30, 2004**

## 2003 WISCONSIN ACT 279

AN ACT *to amend* 48.981 (2) (c), 893.587 and 939.74 (2) (c); and *to create* 48.981 (1) (cv), 48.981 (1) (cx), 48.981 (2) (bm), 893.585 (3), 895.71 and 905.06 (4) of the statutes; **relating to:** the reporting of child abuse or neglect, and actions related to sexual exploitation brought against members of the clergy and religious organizations.

*The people of the state of Wisconsin, represented in senate and assembly, do enact as follows:*

**SECTION 1.** 48.981 (1) (cv) of the statutes is created to read:

48.981 (1) (cv) "Member of a religious order" means an individual who has taken vows devoting himself or herself to religious or spiritual principles and who is authorized or appointed by his or her religious order or organization to provide spiritual or religious advice or service.

**SECTION 2.** 48.981 (1) (cx) of the statutes is created to read:

48.981 (1) (cx) "Member of the clergy" has the meaning given in s. 765.002 (1) or means a member of a religious order, and includes brothers, ministers, monks, nuns, priests, rabbis, and sisters.

**SECTION 3.** 48.981 (2) (bm) of the statutes is created to read:

48.981 (2) (bm) 1. Except as provided in subd. 3. and sub. (2m), a member of the clergy shall report as provided in sub. (3) if the member of the clergy has reasonable cause to suspect that a child seen by the member of the clergy in the course of his or her professional duties:

a. Has been abused, as defined in s. 48.02 (1) (b) to (f); or

b. Has been threatened with abuse, as defined in s. 48.02 (1) (b) to (f), and abuse of the child will likely occur.

2. Except as provided in subd. 3. and sub. (2m), a member of the clergy shall report as provided in sub. (3) if the member of the clergy has reasonable cause, based on observations made or information that he or she receives, to suspect that a member of the clergy has done any of the following:

a. Abused a child, as defined in s. 48.02 (1) (b) to (f).

b. Threatened a child with abuse, as defined in s. 48.02 (1) (b) to (f), and abuse of the child will likely occur.

3. A member of the clergy is not required to report child abuse information under subd. 1. or 2. that he or she receives solely through confidential communications made to him or her privately or in a confessional setting if he or she is authorized to hear or is accustomed to hearing such communications and, under the disciplines, tenets, or traditions of his or her religion, has a duty or is expected to keep those communications secret. Those disciplines, tenets, or traditions need not be in writing.

**SECTION 4.** 48.981 (2) (c) of the statutes is amended to read:

48.981 (2) (c) Any person not otherwise specified in par. (a) ~~or~~, or (bm), including an attorney, who has

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\* Section 991.11, WISCONSIN STATUTES 2001-02 : Effective date of acts. "Every act and every portion of an act enacted by the legislature over the governor's partial veto which does not expressly prescribe the time when it takes effect shall take effect on the day after its date of publication as designated" by the secretary of state [the date of publication may not be more than 10 working days after the date of enactment].

reason to suspect that a child has been abused or neglected or who has reason to believe that a child has been threatened with abuse or neglect and that abuse or neglect of the child will occur may report as provided in sub. (3).

**SECTION 5.** 893.585 (3) of the statutes is created to read:

893.585 (3) This section does not apply to damages incurred under s. 895.71.

**SECTION 6.** 893.587 of the statutes is amended to read:

**893.587 Sexual assault of a child; limitation.** An action to recover damages for injury caused by an act that would constitute a violation of s. 948.02, 948.025, 948.06, or 948.095 or would create a cause of action under s. 895.71 shall be commenced within 5 years after the plaintiff discovers the fact and the probable cause, or with the exercise of reasonable diligence should have discovered the fact and the probable cause, of the injury, whichever occurs first. This section does not shorten the period to commence an action provided under s. 893.16 (1) before the injured party reaches the age of 35 years or be barred.

**SECTION 7.** 895.71 of the statutes is created to read:

**895.71 Sexual exploitation by a member of the clergy. (1) DEFINITIONS.** In this section:

(a) "Member of the clergy" has the meaning given in s. 48.981 (1) (cx).

(b) "Religious organization" means an association, conference, congregation, convention, committee, or other entity that is organized and operated for a religious purpose and that is exempt from federal income tax under 26 USC 501 (c) (3) or (d) and any subunit of such an association, conference, congregation, convention, committee, or entity that is organized and operated for a religious purpose.

(c) "Sexual contact" has the meaning given in s. 940.225 (5) (b).

(2) **CAUSE OF ACTION.** (a) Any person who suffers an injury as a result of sexual contact with a member of the clergy that occurs while the person is under the age of 18 may bring an action against the member of the clergy for all damages caused by that sexual contact.

(b) Any person who may bring an action under par. (a) may bring an action against the religious organization that employed the member of the clergy for all damages caused by that sexual contact if, at the time that the sexual contact occurred, another employee of that religious organization whose duties included supervising that member of the clergy knew or should have known that the member of the clergy previously had sexual contact with a person under the age of 18 and failed to do all of the following:

1. Report that sexual contact under s. 48.981 (3).
2. Exercise ordinary care to prevent similar incidents from occurring.

(c) Notwithstanding ss. 801.09 (1), 801.095, 802.04 (1), and 815.05 (1g) (a), in an action brought under this section, the plaintiff may substitute his or her initials, or fictitious initials, and his or her age and county of residence for his or her name and address on the summons and complaint. The plaintiff's attorney shall supply the court the name and other necessary identifying information of the plaintiff. The court shall maintain the name and other identifying information, and supply the information to other parties to the action, in a manner that reasonably protects the information from being disclosed to the public.

(d) Upon motion by the plaintiff, and for good cause shown, or upon its own motion, the court may make any order that justice requires to protect any of the following:

1. A plaintiff who is using initials in an action under this section from annoyance, embarrassment, oppression, or undue burden that would arise if any information identifying the plaintiff were made public.

2. A plaintiff in an action under this section from unreasonably long, repetitive, or burdensome physical or mental examinations.

3. The confidentiality of information which under law is confidential, until the information is provided in open court in an action under this section.

(3) **CONSENT.** Consent is not an issue in an action under this section.

(4) **CALCULATION OF STATUTE OF LIMITATIONS.** An action under this section is subject to s. 893.587.

(5) **SILENCE AGREEMENTS.** Any contract or agreement concerning the settlement of any claim under this section that limits or eliminates the right of the injured person to disclose the sexual contact described under sub. (2) to another member of the religious organization to which the member of the clergy under sub. (2) belongs, to a therapist, as defined in s. 895.70 (1) (e), to a person listed under s. 48.981 (2) (a), or to a district attorney, is void.

**SECTION 8.** 905.06 (4) of the statutes is created to read:

905.06 (4) **EXCEPTIONS.** There is no privilege under this section concerning observations or information that a member of the clergy, as defined in s. 49.981 (1) (cx), is required to report as suspected or threatened child abuse under s. 48.981 (2) (bm).

**SECTION 9.** 939.74 (2) (c) of the statutes is amended to read:

939.74 (2) (c) A prosecution for violation of s. 948.02, 948.025, 948.03 (2) (a), 948.05, 948.06, 948.07 (1), (2), (3), or (4), 948.08, or 948.095 shall be commenced before the victim reaches the age of ~~31~~ 45 years or be barred, except as provided in sub. (2d) (c).

**SECTION 10. Initial applicability.**

(1) The treatment of sections 48.981 (1) (cv) and (cx) and (2) (bm) and 905.06 (4) of the statutes first applies to observations made or information received by a member of the clergy on the effective date of this subsection.

(2) The treatment of sections 893.587 and 939.74 (2) (c) of the statutes first applies to actions not barred on the effective date of this subsection.

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