



# Know Your Rights:

## Civil Legal Options for Survivors of Sexual Violence in New Jersey

### You Get to Decide. Always.

We believe all survivors, no matter how long ago the harm happened. You deserve healing, justice, and options. Whether you want to take legal action now, later, or never, you are not alone, and the choice is yours.

In New Jersey, the law recognizes that trauma can delay when survivors are ready to speak out. The civil statute of limitations sets the time limit for when you can file a lawsuit in civil court for the harm caused by sexual violence. This is different from criminal cases, where the state brings charges.



*You deserve time to heal and time to choose if legal action is right for you.*

### WHAT CHANGED IN NEW JERSEY LAW?

In 2019, New Jersey passed a survivor-centered law (S477/A3648) that expanded your legal timeline:

**If you were assaulted as an adult:** You have seven years from the assault or from when you discovered the harm it caused (whichever is later).

**If you were assaulted as a child:** You can file a civil lawsuit until you turn 55, or within seven years of discovering the harm (whichever is later).

**There is no criminal statute of limitations for sexual assault in New Jersey (for harm that was caused after the elimination of the criminal statute of limitations in 1996\*). You can report to law enforcement at any time.**

*\*Note: Survivors who experienced abuse between 1991 and 1996 may also be able to pursue criminal charges*

### CIVIL VS. CRIMINAL CASES...WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

CIVIL COURT	CRIMINAL COURT
You (the survivor) file the lawsuit	The state files charges
You can seek money for damages, pain, or negligence	The state seeks punishment (jail, probation, etc.)
You decide if and how to move forward	Prosecutors control the process
You can sue the person <b>or</b> institution (like a school, employer, or agency)	Charges are against the person who harmed you

## HOW TO EXPLORE YOUR LEGAL OPTIONS

You don't have to do this alone. If you're thinking about legal action or just want to know your rights, here's where to start:

### **Talk to a trauma-informed advocate**

They can help you understand your options in a safe, confidential way.

Find an advocate: [njcasa.org/find-help](https://njcasa.org/find-help)

### **Consult a civil attorney**

Some survivors file lawsuits for damages (emotional distress, institutional failure, etc.). If you're not sure where to start, try:

#### **Legal Services of New Jersey**

[lsnj.org/](https://lsnj.org/) or 1-888-LSNJ-LAW

Free statewide civil legal aid. Offers help with restraining orders, housing, immigration, public benefits, etc.

#### **Take Back the Night Foundation National Sexual Assault Hotline**

[takebackthenight.org/legal-assistance/](https://takebackthenight.org/legal-assistance/) or call 567-SHATTER (567-742-8837)

24/7 confidential national hotline that connects attorneys who can discuss legal options with survivors of sexual violence.

#### **Partners**

[partnersnj.org](https://partnersnj.org) or 973-233-0111

Specializes in free legal representation for low-income survivors in family law matters (restraining orders, custody, child support) for the following counties: Essex, Union, Middlesex, Hudson, Passaic.

#### **Seton Hall University Center for Social Justice**

[csj\\_reception@shu.edu](mailto:csj_reception@shu.edu) or call 973-642-8700 or 973-761-9000 ext. 8700

University legal clinic supporting survivors of sexual violence.

#### **New Jersey Crime Victims' Law Center**

Richard Pompelio: Call 973-903-9848 or [rpompelio@njcrimevictims.org](mailto:rpompelio@njcrimevictims.org)

NJC VLC provides pro bono legal assistance to victims of violent crime in New Jersey.

### **You may qualify for compensation**

You may be eligible for help from the **Victims of Crime Compensation Office (VCCO)**, which may cover some legal or out-of-pocket costs as a result of the harm you have experienced. An advocate can help you apply. [njoag.gov/vcco/vcco-victims/](https://njoag.gov/vcco/vcco-victims/)

### **To Learn More:**

Please visit [njcasa.org](https://njcasa.org)

Please note that our website is a non-emergency resource.

### **For Emergencies:**

Please visit the **Find Help Page** or contact the 24-hour statewide hotline at 1-800-601-7200.