

Chair of NH youth advisory board resigns after accusations of child abuse

New Hampshire Public Radio | By [Jason Moon](#), [Todd Bookman](#)

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Google Maps

A screenshot from Google Maps shows the sign for Camp E-Toh-Anee near Colebrook as it looked in 2011. The camp has since closed. Former camp employee Michael Adamkowski is accused of multiple acts of child abuse by at least six separate plaintiffs in civil lawsuits filed against the state of New Hampshire and other defendants.

The chairperson of New Hampshire's Division for Children, Youth and Families Advisory Board has resigned from his position following accusations of child abuse by at least six separate plaintiffs in civil lawsuits filed against the state of New Hampshire and other defendants.

Michael Adamkowski, 63, resigned from his position following inquiries by NHPR. In an emailed statement to NHPR, Gov. Chris Sununu's office said

Thursday it was not aware of the allegations, and added: "This individual has since resigned from the board, and we are working to appoint an appropriate replacement."

The accusations of physical and sexual abuse against Adamkowski come from anonymous plaintiffs who are among the more than 1,100 people who have [filed suit against the state](#) for alleged abuse at the Sununu Youth Services Center (formerly YDC) and related facilities spanning about 60 years.

A spokesperson for the New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services said they were also not aware of the allegations against Adamkowski, raising questions about how closely state officials are examining the civil lawsuits, all of which name the state as a defendant.

Adamkowski also resigned from his position on the Haverhill Cooperative School Board Wednesday after NHPR began reporting on the abuse allegations against him. He was appointed to the board in April of 2023, according to [a news report](#).

"Adamkowski said this was not an admission of guilt, rather he didn't want to detract from the important work of the school board," Superintendent of Schools Laurie Melanson wrote in an email to NHPR.

The plaintiffs allege Adamkowski abused them at a residential program in Colebrook called Camp E-Toh-Anee in the 1990s and 2000s. The wilderness therapy camp was designed to treat children found delinquent by New Hampshire courts. According to [his LinkedIn profile](#), Adamkowski spent 27 years at the company and held the title of "Director of NH Operations."

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FAMILIES ADVISORY BOARD UNTIL TOLD BY NHPR IN A RECENT INTERVIEW.

"I just got to say that's scary. It's very scary," he said.

Adamkowski did not respond to multiple requests for comment for this story.

Adamkowski is not named as a defendant in any of the civil lawsuits, and is not facing any criminal charges.

Eckerd Youth Alternatives, the company that operated Camp E-Toh-Anee, is also accused of allowing abusive practices at its facilities, and is named as a defendant in at least 55 pending lawsuits. Those civil complaints allege physical and sexual abuse by a number of Eckerd staffers from the late 1980s to the late 2000s. The Florida-based company, now known as Eckerd Connects, has operated youth residential facilities in multiple states since the 1970s.

Attorneys for Eckerd Connects did not respond to a request for comment.

Advisory board created to advocate for children, youth

According to the [state Health Department website](#), members of the DCYF Advisory Board “serve as advocates to ensure that children and youth are guaranteed an independent voice within the public policy process,” and is “committed to supporting the strength and quality of life of children, youth and families in New Hampshire.” It was created to keep the state in compliance with certain federal regulations and grants, and to advise the state agency that investigates allegations of child abuse and runs the youth detention center. The board includes elected representatives and professionals in the child welfare field.

Adamkowski was appointed in 2009, according to media reports. His current term was set to expire in December 2024.

Meeting minutes for the group show it regularly hears presentations from stakeholders involved in responding to and preventing child abuse and neglect. The board also receives regular updates on the planned construction of a [new youth detention facility](#) set to replace the Sununu Youth Services Center complex in Manchester. At its most recent meeting in February, the board was provided a “brief overview of lawsuits/investigations,” as well, according to [publicly available minutes](#).

Members of the DCYF Advisory Board didn't respond or declined requests for comment. Rep. Debra DeSimone, a Republican who serves on the board, wrote that she was "saddened" by the allegations, but added, "I have put a hold on my personal opinion until the courts rule on this case."

'There was blood on the snow'

Camp E-Toh-Anee opened in Colebrook, in far northern New Hampshire, in 1986 and operated for 20 years, according to a [2021 report](#) by Eckerd Connects. The report says the facility "served and helped more than 500 New Hampshire youth."

At the camp, children chopped firewood and slept in tents heated by wood stoves. The apparent use of Native American language to name the camp is in line with the widespread appropriation of Indigenous culture at camps throughout New England. At Camp E-Toh-Anee, residents were divided into groups of eight to 10 boys, each assigned the name of a tribe native to the region. The evenings were marked by "pow-wows" around a campfire, according to media reports. Staffers were referred to as "chiefs;" Adamkowski was known as "Chief Mike," according to six of the civil lawsuits naming him as an abuser.

Judges in New Hampshire's juvenile courts sent children to the camp to learn life lessons from the spartan wilderness experience. As one district court judge reportedly put it as he sentenced a boy to the program in 1998: "You're going into the woods. You're going to learn to be a man. There are no creature comforts."

John Doe #750 says beginning in 2000 at age 13, he spent about three years at the camp after repeatedly getting into trouble for smoking marijuana. Within a few days of arriving, John Doe #750 said Adamkowski was giving a speech to children when a dog belonging to Adamkowski began barking.

"Mike just flipped," John Doe #750 told NHPR in an interview. "He bent over and started beating the sh*t out of his dog." John Doe #750 said the beating was so severe the dog rolled over and began urinating on itself.

When John Doe #750 objected, he claims Adamkowski became aggressive, asking, "Who's going to make me stop?"

"And I went to say something and he punched me in the lip," said John Doe #750.

"And I was so taken aback that I started crying, honestly. I was, like, a tough kid and everything and, like, whatever, but I started crying... I spit on the snow and there was blood on the snow."

On another occasion, John Doe #750 said Adamkowski refused to act when he disclosed sexual abuse by another staff member to him.

"Chief Mike knew about [the abuse]." John Doe #750 told NHPR. "And he didn't do sh*t about it. You know why he knew? Because I told him."

Another plaintiff, identified in court records as John Doe #628, said Adamkowski groped him while he performed chores at Adamkowski's home near the camp.

"I was painting his shed one day and he had come up behind me on the ladder," John Doe #628 told NHPR in an interview. According to John Doe #628, Adamkowski then directed him on where to paint, "and as he did, like, he would grope me. He would ... grab my ass." According to John Doe #628's civil complaint, Adamkowski touched him sexually on the buttocks over his clothes at least five times in total.

Asked if he felt he was being groomed by Adamkowski for further sexual abuse, John Doe #628 told NHPR, "1,000%, dude."

"He's not stupid, he knew what he was doing." said John Doe #628. "There is not a shadow of a doubt in my mind that's exactly what he was trying to do."

Other allegations of abuse by Adamkowski include:

- A man identified as John Doe #825 claims Adamkowski physically abused him more than a dozen times, including by punching him in the stomach and beating him while he was restrained on the ground.

- John Doe #851 alleges he was beaten by Adamkowski and other staffers while they restrained him.
- John Doe #928 claims “Chief Mike Adamkowski” beat him while restrained “at least 10 times,” causing him to suffer black eyes, bruises, “and one occasion, a skull fracture.” He also claims Adamkowski fondled his genitals over his clothes while he was restrained at least 10 times.
- John Doe #837 alleges “Chief Adamkowski” punched him in the face on at least two occasions.

All of the John Does were adolescent boys when the abuse allegedly occurred.

Other former campers NHPR spoke to remember their time fondly, and say the conditions were better than they experienced at more carceral youth facilities.

Eckerd Connects no longer operates any residential facilities in New Hampshire. However, from 2020 to 2023, the state [paid Eckerd Connects \\$432,000](#) for services designed to help identify child welfare cases with the highest probability of serious injury or death.

Eckerd facilities in other states have come under scrutiny for mistreating minors in their custody, [including in Florida](#) in 2021, when foster children were allegedly housed in Eckerd’s administrative offices in what a local sheriff described as “disgusting and deplorable” conditions. Florida’s Department of Children and Families subsequently announced it would not renew its foster care contracts with Eckerd. In a [memo](#), the agency’s leader wrote that “Eckerd’s recent actions and inactions have jeopardized the health, safety and welfare of the dependent children under your care.”

In North Carolina, a lawsuit filed in 2021 by a former resident of a camp operated by Eckerd alleged she was sexually assaulted on four occasions in 1991 by a female employee at the facility. The suit seeks monetary damages from Eckerd, as well as the state’s juvenile delinquency agency, alleging they were negligent in protecting the victim. The case is on hold pending an appeal regarding changes to North Carolina’s statute of limitations laws.

In recent years, more than 1,100 victims of alleged sexual and physical abuse at the youth detention center in Manchester, and government-contracted privately run youth facilities like Camp E-Toh-Anee, have come forward in New Hampshire, detailing a culture of violence and intimidation carried out by employees and contractors. In the wake of the lawsuits, state prosecutors have [arrested at least 11 former detention center employees](#), charging them with sexual assault and other crimes, and have asked any former residents of the facility to assist in documenting other allegations of abuse.

The ongoing civil lawsuits brought by former residents of the youth facilities present a [potentially seismic financial cost](#) to the state, according to lawyers backing the cases. In response, the New Hampshire Legislature created a \$100 million fund to pay settlements to alleged victims, if they agreed to forgo legal cases.

The [first trials](#) are scheduled to begin in April.

NHPR's Lauren Chooljian contributed reporting.

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