



Former Oregon Youth Authority top doctor accused of widespread sexual abuse of boys in custody

By [Lauren Dake](#) (OPB)

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Note: This story contains descriptions of sexual assault. If you or someone you know may be a victim of sexual assault, confidential support, information and advice are available at the [National Sexual Assault Hotline](#) by calling 800-656-4673. Text chat is also available [online](#).

Ten men who were held in custody as children at the MacLaren Youth Correctional Facility are suing the state, alleging they were repeatedly sexually abused by the top doctor at the facility.

The lawsuit alleges that Dr. Edward Gary Edwards repeatedly molested the boys, whose ages ranged from 12-16 at the time, and despite reporting the abuse several times, nothing happened. The abuse was allegedly so widespread the doctor had a well-known nickname: “Dr. Cold Fingers.”

The lawsuit was filed in Multnomah County. The alleged victims are seeking \$51 million.

“Our clients will testify, and you will hear that MacLaren corrections officers and staff who received those reports (of abuse) ignored them and worse than that, we allege in this lawsuit that at times the MacLaren staff weaponized Dr. Edwards’ abuse of youth and by that we mean, when one of our clients’ behavior wasn’t to the staff’s liking, they would threaten them ‘hey, if you don’t get in line, we’re gonna send you to see Dr. Cold Fingers.’”

The lawsuit alleges that when the boys would seek legitimate medical care, including one for a sore throat, the doctor would make them take down their pants and grope their genitals with his ungloved hands.

A spokesman for the Oregon Youth Authority declined to comment.

Edwards was employed at the Oregon Youth Authority as a pediatrician starting in 1977. He was later named chief medical officer at MacLaren, a closed-custody facility in Woodburn overseen by the state's youth authority.

The abuse alleged by the men in the lawsuit happened between 2000 and 2007. All the men who are accusing the doctor of abuse are now in their 30s. Edwards died last month. He worked at the facility for more than four decades.

Peter Janci, one of the attorneys representing the 10 men, say they shared consistent stories of the alleged abuse and many were abused on numerous occasions. Janci said Edwards allegedly groped the boys, touched their genitalia and "in some instances that led to him penetrating their anuses with his fingers."

For many of the men, their suffering did not end when they left state custody, Janci continued. Many of them have struggled with long-term impacts from severe emotional distress, to substance abuse and other mental health issues.

"And I think notably, a loss of trust in authority figures and for some of them, that's had a particularly insidious impact because," Janci said at a Thursday news conference. "their loss of trust is heightened when it comes to medical or psychological treatment. And so not only were they hurt, but their ability to seek help and seek healing has been severely hindered by the abuse that they suffered in this context."

Janci said he believes this lawsuit will be the "tip of the iceberg" with many more to follow. His office has been fielding calls with clients reporting stories of abuse.

The "repeated sexual exploitation of helpless children in the custody" of Oregon is a "stain on our state's conscience," Janci said.

The lawsuit was filed the same day Gov. Tina Kotek's office announced she fired the director of the Oregon Youth Authority. The youth authority is currently [investigating abuse complaints](#) that the agency has mishandled more current abuse complaints, as first reported by The Oregonian/OregonLive.

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