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Jehovah's Witnesses leaders say they don't protect sexual abusers



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In the face of evidence that the Jehovah's Witnesses organization in Australia failed to report more than 1,000 allegations (<https://www.revealnews.org/blog/jehovahs-witnesses-shield-child-sexual-abusers-from-police-report-says/>) of child sexual abuse, the religion's leaders say they're doing a great job of protecting children.

The response comes from a 141-page document filed (<https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/2649236-Submissions-on-Behalf-of-Watchtower-Bible-and.html>) by the Witnesses to an Australian government commission investigating rampant child sexual abuse within the religion. It provides an uncommon look into the reasoning of an organization that has come under fire on at least three continents for shielding child abusers from prosecution.

“It is quite apparent that Jehovah's Witnesses have for at least the last 65 years taken a proactive role in investigating and documenting such abuse and taken action against proved abusers,” the filing reads.

In recent years, Jehovah's Witnesses leaders have worked to avoid answering for their policies (<https://www.revealnews.org/blog/how-jehovahs-witness-leaders-are-responding-to-child-abuse-scrutiny/>) by shutting out the media, withholding documents under subpoena and, in some cases, refusing to testify in court.

Now the Witnesses have lashed back. In their rebuttal, they paint attorneys in the case as inexperienced, witnesses as unreliable, the criminal justice system as ineffective and the commission as overstepping its mandate.

They say they don't protect abusers, don't endanger children and don't break the law. At issue are policy directives (<https://www.revealnews.org/article/jehovahs-witnesses-use-1st-amendment-to-hide-child-sex-abuse-claims/>) originating from the religion's world headquarters in New York. Among them:

- Elders are to report every allegation of child sexual abuse to headquarters, but not to secular authorities unless required by law.
- Elders are not to take action against an accused child abuser without a confession, or two witnesses to the crime.
- Elders are not to announce to the congregation that child abuse has occurred, even when the abuser is allowed to remain a member.

Here's a brief look at some of the arguments put forth in the Witnesses' response.

- **Child safety is the organization's top priority:** "The safety of the victim and other children in congregations of Jehovah's Witnesses is the first concern of elders, the Australia branch and the Governing Body."
- **Jehovah's Witnesses comply with secular laws:** "So long as there is no violation of the secular law, the handling of the sin of child abuse by Jehovah's Witnesses based on Scripture cannot be faulted from a secular point of view."
- **Most sexual assault cases are not prosecuted anyway:** "In other words, resorting to the criminal justice system is not a 'cure-all' of the problem."
- **The two-witness rule cannot be changed:** "Jehovah's Witnesses consider that the requirement for two witnesses is not a matter for

debate as it is based on Scriptural requirements found in the Mosaic Law and reiterated by Jesus Christ and the Apostle Paul.”

- **Jehovah's Witnesses monitor sexual misconduct by young members to prevent child abuse:** “Elders are instructed to call the branch office if they learn that a minor is involved in ‘sexting.’”
- **Elders may punish child abusers, even if they don't call the police:** “The elders may warn the accused or place restrictions on his contact with children; and subsequently disfellowship the accused for breaching those restrictions.”
- **Not all abusers reoffend:** “The mere presence of an offender within a congregation does not necessarily entail that other children in a congregation or the community are at risk.”
- **Repentance goes a long way:** “If a person is truly repentant, then, by definition they are asserting that they are unlikely to sin again because they have an understanding of their wrongdoing and do not want to repeat it.”
- **Jehovah's Witnesses can gauge an abuser's risk of reoffending as well as anyone:** “Further, neither psychiatrists, nor psychologists, have a monopoly on the prediction of human behaviour. Indeed, every day of the week, ordinary people predict with some accuracy the behaviour of others and, by and large, our daily experiences demonstrate the accuracy of such predictions.”

For more, read:

- The Witnesses' [full rebutta](https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/2649236-Submissions-on-Behalf-of-Watchtower-Bible-and.html)
(<https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/2649236-Submissions-on-Behalf-of-Watchtower-Bible-and.html>)
(<https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/2649236-Submissions-on-Behalf-of-Watchtower-Bible-and.html>).

- The Australian [commission's findings](https://www.revealnews.org/blog/jehovahs-witnesses-shield-child-sexual-abusers-from-police-report-says/) (<https://www.revealnews.org/blog/jehovahs-witnesses-shield-child-sexual-abusers-from-police-report-says/>).
- How the [religion shields sex abusers](https://www.revealnews.org/article/jehovahs-witnesses-use-1st-amendment-to-hide-child-sex-abuse-claims/) (<https://www.revealnews.org/article/jehovahs-witnesses-use-1st-amendment-to-hide-child-sex-abuse-claims/>) in the United States.
- The story of how it [kicked one alleged victim out](https://www.revealnews.org/article/jehovahs-witnesses-cover-up-child-sex-abuse-and-oust-a-victim/) (<https://www.revealnews.org/article/jehovahs-witnesses-cover-up-child-sex-abuse-and-oust-a-victim/>) of the religion.

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