# 'It’s shameful': family of deaf girl alleges abuse, culture of neglect in Ontario’s schools for the deaf

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**POSTED FEB 1, 2021 6:47 PM EST**

The family of a deaf girl is speaking out about what they call a consistent culture of neglect within Ontario’s schools for the deaf.

They wish to remain anonymous to protect their child’s identity, but say she’s been severely traumatized after her school failed to protect her from multiple assaults.

“We’re probably the world’s leaders in neglecting deaf children. It’s shameful,” the family told CityNews in a phone interview. “Our daughter was allowed to be mistreated for years because there was simply no accountability of her abusers.”

They allege the most recent abuse started in 2018, at the Ernest C. Drury School for the deaf in Milton, where their daughter was assaulted by an older student “at least a hundred pounds heavier and much stronger” than her.

In a letter to the Ministry of Education, the family says the assaults resulted in a brain injury and a significant fear of attending school. They say they complained that the school had failed to protect their daughter and in response, the family alleges the superintendent “covered up the school’s failure by withholding information from the police and failed to interview our daughter to get her account of the events.”

The family says their daughter was so severely traumatized, she started to experience severe headaches, nausea, photosensitivity and balance issues, which eventually escalated to psychotic episodes in class. During one such episode, she “suffered from hallucinations of people that were not there, people who told her to bring a knife to school and to kill herself, which she tried.”

“The school believed the bullies and didn’t believe her, that she was a victim. And this crushed her,” the family says. “It just made her health so much worse, because she was walking around terrified of getting hurt.”

They say the school denied their daughter medical accommodations, which caused avoidable and life-threatening physical and mental health struggles.

“I think she was failed by the system,” says Eugene Bhattacharya, the family’s lawyer. “Their responses contained misinformation and factual matters that were simply incorrect.”

Ontario’s deaf schools are run directly by the province and have long been accused of neglecting students.

In 2016, three schools for the deaf, including E.C. Drury, were named in a class-action suit alleging students were physically, sexually, and psychologically abused at the schools. The Ontario government settled, paying victims a total of $15 million. While families hoped the lawsuit would bring about change, they say the abuse and neglect have only continued.

“It isn’t a solution to simply have a new class action settlement every generation,” says Marshall Swadron, another lawyer for the family. “They have to get to the root of the problem and it seems to be a problem of supervision based on what we’ve seen.”

In a statement to CityNews, the Ministry of Education said it would be inappropriate to comment on specific student cases but they take all such allegations “very seriously.”

“[We] will fully investigate any such allegations. The provincial and demonstration schools branch takes the health, safety, well-being and learning needs of each student seriously,” they said.

The family wants the province to appoint an independent investigator to examine the schools. They’re hopeful that filing a complaint with the Ministry of Education and exposing this abuse will force the system to improve for all deaf students in Ontario.