

# Boys still sexually abused by Scout volunteers despite reforms, arrest suggests

## Lawyers lining up clients to sue bankrupt organization before Nov. 16 deadline to lodge claims

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He played Santa Claus at a charity Christmas breakfast. He volunteered at tree plantings and neighborhood clean-ups. He worked the pancake breakfast to raise money for Boy Scout programs in low-income Long Beach schools.

"I love to help," says [Lewis Brownson's Facebook page](#) by way of introduction.

Brownson, 43, has been feted in the city's "Sparks of Change Neighborhood Leadership Program" for his contributions and hard work. But, in an agonizingly common twist, the Boy Scout leader was arrested June 16 on two counts of lewd acts upon a child under age 14, with an allegation of multiple victims, according to the Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office.

A preliminary investigation by Long Beach police found that an 8-year-old boy had been sexually abused while participating in an after-school program over several years — from 2016 through 2018, according to a police spokesperson. Brownson was booked at the Long Beach city jail, with bail set at \$1.2 million.

"The Boy Scouts say they've put safeguards in place, that abuse is a problem of the past," said Andrew VanArsdale, a lead attorney with [AbusedInScouting.com](#). "But we represent the families of children who were abused in the past year, the past two years.

"If the Boy Scouts of America has proven anything over its history, it's that they allowed this to happen and never cared enough to stop it."

So far, AIS represents more than 4,500 men and boys who say they were abused in Scouting. The oldest is 93. The youngest is 8.

### Filed for bankruptcy

The iconic, national Boy Scouts of America [filed for bankruptcy in February](#) as hundreds of lawsuits piled up from men who said they were sexually abused by BSA Scoutmasters and volunteers as children. The bankruptcy court set a Nov. 16 deadline for men to file a notice of claims against the organization, or lose the right to seek redress.

"The fact that there's a bar date just a couple of months out that forever cuts off the accountability of the BSA is one of the most important things we need to think about right now," said Mike Reck, an attorney with [Jeff Anderson & Associates](#), which represents hundreds of alleged victims. "That's a very important date for survivors."

Stepping forward is excruciatingly difficult for many men, who've been carrying their pain and shame in silence for decades, the attorneys say. Only a small percentage of victims will likely come forward, but there can be great relief — and perhaps a measure of justice — from speaking out.

"I remember the terror," said Gill Gayle, 58, an actor and producer in Los Angeles who said he was abused by two Scout leaders in Tennessee as a boy. "There was this fear of being discovered, so everything from that moment forward really became, ironically, about creating a way to protect what happened. I didn't want anyone to find out. Ever. No matter what."

Gayle traveled a familiar trajectory for abuse survivors — alcohol abuse, drug abuse and finally suicide attempts — before he finally spoke to friends, found a therapist and took action. He talked to the police. Tracked down his abusers. One was dead. The other is a registered sex offender in Tennessee.

Facing the past allowed him to live again, he said.

"There are thousands of us. As a group, we need to have a voice. The organization needs to be held responsible. I know in my heart that 90 percent of these men aren't going to come forward — I know how hard it is. I was one of them. But it gave me strength and hope and empowered me. It's certainly worth it."

Woldon Denney said he knows as well. He was a 15-year-old in Long Beach when he joined the Scouts to forge a constructive path and avoid troubles at home. The leader gave Denney coveted troop positions and let him spend the night at the leader's home. After he was molested, Denney quit Scouting, but said he carries the scars to this day.

"The only thing I ever really wanted was a son of my own," said Denney, 42, who now lives in Washington state. "But it's hard to have a relationship. It robbed the chance of me having my own family."

The Nov. 16 bar date is an important milestone, the BSA said, setting a clear timeline for victims to come forward and later seek compensation from its proposed compensation trust.

"We encourage all victims to file a claim and will be providing extensive noticing to ensure that there is a clear process for them to do so," the BSA said.

### 'Deeply disturbed' at allegations

About 90 percent of claims against the Boy Scouts of America relate to abuse that occurred more than 30 years ago, it says on a [website devoted to the bankruptcy](#). It wants to use bankruptcy to carve out a victim compensation fund while also ensuring that programs continue.

And while the BSA says that [Scouting is safer now than ever before](#) — with more thorough screening and rules designed to prevent volunteers from being alone with children — it apparently wasn't enough to protect boys in Long Beach.

"We were deeply disturbed to learn of these allegations, and our hearts go out to the victim and the victim's family," said John Fullerton, Scout Executive for the Long Beach Area Council, by email.

Upon learning of Brownson's arrest, "we took immediate action to remove this individual from Scouting and prohibit him from any future participation in our programs. We will continue to cooperate with law enforcement as they investigate this matter. Anyone with any information on potential abuse should contact authorities to ensure the safety of our youth in and out of Scouting," Fullerton said.

The Scouts care deeply about all victims of child abuse and sincerely apologize to anyone who was harmed during their time in Scouting, he said. "We believe victims, we support them, and we encourage them to come forward."

The national organization echoed Fullerton's sentiments.

"We are heartbroken that there have been times when individuals took advantage of our program to abuse innocent children and we are so sorry for the pain it has caused," said a statement from the BSA, based in Texas, by email.

The BSA has partnered with 1in6, a national resource for male survivors, to expand online services so more men can anonymously access support when and how they need it at [www.1in6.org/BSA](#), the organization said

The BSA filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy to achieve two key objectives, the statement said: equitably compensate victims who were harmed during their time in Scouting and continue to carry out Scouting's mission for years to come.

To that end, the bankruptcy aims to minimize liability for some 270 local Boy Scout councils — such as the ones in Los Angeles, Orange, Long Beach and the Inland Empire — to protect a vast real estate empire worth hundreds of millions of dollars for future generations of Scouts.

That real estate is owned by the local councils, not by the national organization. The attempt to shield local councils enrages some victims, who say that the abuse happened in local councils, and local councils should be held accountable along with the national organization.

"It's like the Catholic Church's playbook — 'we don't own anything,' so none of the local assets get included," said Reck of the Anderson firm, which specializes in childhood abuse cases. "We all know that the local councils are controlled by the BSA."

The BSA said it has created an ad hoc committee of local councils "so they can participate in the continued evaluation of the best path forward."

"We are working with and actively encouraging the Ad Hoc Committee, councils, and attorneys representing survivors of abuse to find a solution that will appropriately fund a Trust, while also ensuring the future of Scouting," it said.

### 'Sold its soul'

But there's some debate over whether there should be a future for Scouting.

The ideals are noble: Scouts pledge to help other people at all times and to keep themselves "physically strong, mentally awake, and morally straight."

"The organization is none of that," Gayle said. "It's a bunch of old white dudes trying to hide the truth of what's going on, at a gargantuan level, and it has been from the beginning of Scouting. You have this costume that evokes trust in the community and gives abusers the opportunity to have children alone. It's fraught with danger."

A decade ago, a suit filed by Los Angeles attorney [Paul Mones](#) resulted in the release of the Boy Scouts' "Perversion Files" — details of alleged sexual abuse secretly kept by the Boy Scouts for decades, as well as a \$19.9 million verdict for a former Scout. Gayle combed those files.

"They've identified 7,000 pedophiles operating in Boy Scouts and more than 12,000 sexual assaults — and neither guy who assaulted me is on the list," he said. "You realize they never even report it. These guys just go to another town and start over, like in the Catholic Church."

There's a need for an organization that can help impart strong character lessons to kids, "but I don't think this is the one," Gayle said. "This one sold its soul a long time ago and there's no getting it back."

### Time clock ticks

Many law firms are filing bankruptcy notices of claims with the bankruptcy court in advance of the Nov. 16 deadline. AbusedInScouting.com is the largest, launched 18 months ago by a group of law firms from all over the country.

"The bottom line is the BSA knew this was a problem, a total pedophile infiltration into their programs, but did absolutely nothing to stop it," said Julianna Evans, a spokeswoman for AIS. "What is critical for men to know is that now is the time to come forward. After this bar date of Nov. 16 this year, your rights to hold anyone accountable for abuse that occurred during Scouting, no matter when that abuse happened, will be forever eliminated."

Meantime, Brownson's arraignment is scheduled for July 7 at the Long Beach courthouse.

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