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## San Antonio archdiocese settles abuse suit for \$1M

By PAUL J. WEBER Associated Press © 2011 The Associated Press  
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**SAN ANTONIO** — The attorney for a Texas teenager who settled a molestation lawsuit against the Roman Catholic church for nearly \$1 million said Tuesday the money will help pay for counseling, while the priest who allegedly tried hiring a hit man to kill the boy was set to appear in court this week.

John Fiala, 52, remains in a Dallas County jail on criminal charges of soliciting someone to kill his accuser, who received \$946,000 from the Archdiocese of San Antonio in a settlement announced by the church last week.

Fiala, who allegedly negotiated a \$5,000 price for killing the boy before police moved in, was scheduled Thursday to make his first criminal court appearance in Dallas since his November arrest, according to court records. Rex Gunter, his attorney, did not immediately return a phone message left at his Dallas office

Tuesday.

The teenage boy was 16 when Fiala allegedly began abusing him at a West Texas parish in 2007. The lawsuit filed against Fiala last April accuses him of twice forcing the boy to have sex at gunpoint, while Fiala was the pastor at Sacred Heart of Mary Parish in the remote community of Rocksprings.

Tahira Khan Merritt, the victim's attorney, said the settlement provided some closure for him.

"But he's got a long way to go," Merritt said. "He's got some very serious mental issues about what happened to him."

Merritt said the teen remains under psychiatric care. She declined to say where he was living now.

Also named in the civil lawsuit is the Archdiocese of Omaha, Neb., where Fiala was ordained in 1984. Merritt said she was meeting Thursday with that archdiocese for a court-ordered mediation, which could result in another settlement.

Deacon Tim McNeil said Tuesday the Omaha Archdiocese was not involved in the settlement announced last week in San Antonio, so he could not comment on the lawsuit because the case is still pending.

Merritt said the settlement with the San Antonio Archdiocese was reached last month. San Antonio Archdiocese spokesman Pat Rodgers said documents making the settlement official weren't signed until Thursday, and that the church forbids confidential settlements under its charter unless one is requested by the plaintiff.

"In order to help to begin to bring closure to this painful chapter and help the victim, his family, and our people to start the process of healing, we felt it was important to settle at this time," Archbishop Gustavo Garcia-Siller said.

Authorities arrested Fiala on Nov. 18 in the Dallas suburb of Garland. Prosecutors say Fiala offered a neighbor money to kill the boy, and the neighbor told police and helped them arrange a sting.

Fiala, who is charged with solicitation of capital murder, is being held on \$700,000 bail.

Associated Press Writer Josh Funk in Omaha, Neb., contributed to this report.

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