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California Reopens Time-Barred Adult Sexual Assault Claims Under AB 250

California lawmakers have enacted a significant change to civil sexual assault litigation that took effect on January 1, 2026. Governor Gavin Newsom signed into law, Assembly Bill 250 (“AB 250”), in which adult survivors of sexual assault may again be able to pursue civil lawsuits that would otherwise be barred by the statute of limitations. The legislation creates a limited two-year “revival” or “look-back” period, allowing certain previously expired claims to be filed between January 1, 2026, and December 31, 2027.

AB 250 was designed to reopen the courthouse doors for a particular category of cases involving sexual assault committed against individuals who were adults at the time of the misconduct. The law allows claims that would normally be dismissed as untimely to proceed during the revival window if they involve a sexual assault that occurred after the survivor turned 18 and if the survivor can allege that some form of concealment, suppression, or a cover-up occurred that prevented accountability or delayed disclosure. This new law is not a broad reopening of all adult sexual assault claims, but rather focuses on cases where an entity or responsible party is alleged to have taken steps to hide wrongdoing or prevent information from becoming known.

Further, this legislation focuses heavily on private defendants and does not apply to public entities. The law’s effect may extend beyond the assault itself and can create broader liability exposure where employment conduct is intertwined with the alleged events. For instance, lawsuits may include additional employment-related theories, such as harassment, retaliation, or wrongful termination, where the assault occurred in a workplace setting or where adverse employment actions followed disclosure or attempted reporting.

For employers and private organizations, AB 250 is an important reminder that historic claims may resurface even years later. Organizations may wish to proactively review their past policies, training, reporting mechanisms, and investigative procedures. Businesses should also consider the potential litigation and reputational risks associated with revived claims and consult counsel regarding document retention, workplace culture, and risk management strategies before the law takes effect.

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The passage of AB 250 reflects California's continued commitment to removing procedural barriers for survivors in qualifying cases, particularly where concealment or institutional misconduct is alleged. With the revival period scheduled to run from January 1, 2026 through December 31, 2027, survivors and private entities alike should understand that the statute is not indefinite, and that the right to file qualifying revived claims will expire once the window closes.

Stokes Wagner will continue to monitor updates and will provide additional updates as they become available. If you have any questions, do not hesitate to contact a Stokes Wagner attorney.

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