

Girl allowed to testify against former priest

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**Page:** 1  
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The former Aurora Central Catholic High School student who accused ex-priest Mark **Campobello** of sexual abuse will be allowed to testify in a trial involving similar charges brought against him by a Geneva student.

During a hearing Thursday, Kane County Judge Timothy Sheldon said he would allow the testimony and that evidence would not diminish **Campobello's** right to a fair trial.

**Campobello's** defense attorney, Van Richards, fought against the request brought by prosecutors and disagreed with the ruling.

"I'm not surprised," Richards said.

He called the state's desire to bring more than one girl into the case a "safety in numbers" tactic.

The decision, which Sheldon said is allowed under a specific 1998 law governing sexual misconduct, opens the door to allowing accusations brought against **Campobello** in 2003 to be used to prove allegations brought in 2002.

In most instances, the law doesn't allow evidence not related to the specific charges at hand to be brought up at trial because doing so would violate the defendant's rights to fair trial.

But prosecutors argued, and Sheldon agreed, that the 1998 law allows an exception in sexual abuse cases. The rationale, Sheldon explained, is based on the abuser's tendency to repeat offenses. Allowing the exception serves the public good, Sheldon said.

While **Campobello** faces charges stemming from both accused cases of sexual abuse, Sheldon's ruling involved the case set to go to trial in May.

In that case, **Campobello** faces five counts of aggravated criminal sexual abuse and five counts of aggravated criminal sexual assault involving the Geneva girl.

The girl was 14 at the time of the alleged abuse. Prosecutors say **Campobello** abused the girl between January and May of 1999.

Prosecutors say the second girl, now 20, came forward after hearing media reports about the first case.

In that situation **Campobello** is accused of abusing the girl, who was 16 to 17 years of age at the time, on three separate occasions between Nov. 1, 1999 and March 31, 2000. In that case, which is being tried separately, he faces three additional charges of criminal sexual abuse.