

NEWSDAY Editorial

Editorial: Release Friedman papers, but protect victims

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Photo credit: Jim Staubitzer / News 12 | A judge has asked Nassau County prosecutors to turn over all paperwork on the Jesse Friedman case to the former defendant. Friedman claims he was wrongly coerced into pleading guilty in 1988 to charges of child sexual abuse.

In a miserable case that just won't go away, Jesse Friedman should be allowed to see the statements and evidence amassed against him in the decades-old prosecution in which he pleaded guilty of sexually abusing young boys.

But the names of all 17 of the victims should be redacted from their

grand jury testimony and statements to police before they're handed over, not just those of the three who requested that consideration from the judge who ordered the documents released. And Friedman and his lawyers should be ordered not to reveal the identity of the victims. Their privacy should be protected, even after all these years. Friedman has insisted for years that he was coerced into pleading guilty of sexually abusing more than a dozen children during computer classes in his family's Great Neck home in the 1980s. He served 13 years in prison. His father, Arnold, who also pleaded guilty, died in prison in 1995.

A 2003 documentary, "Capturing the Friedmans," raised questions about police interview techniques that Friedman said led to false accusations at a time when the nation was in a panic about other cases of mass child sex abuse. In an effort to clear his name, Friedman sought the records under the state's Freedom of Information Law.

A spokesman for Nassau District Attorney Kathleen Rice said the ruling will be appealed. Grand jury testimony is routinely kept secret. That's important in persuading victims to testify, particularly those who were molested. But Friedman and his lawyers already know who they are in this case.

After an exhaustive review of the case, Rice concluded in June that Friedman was not wrongfully convicted. It's unlikely that anything new will surface at this late date that would justify tossing out Friedman's confession. But in the interests of justice, everything except the victims' identities should be aired.

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