**Seek Help of Pope Francis to Enact SOL Reform in New York**

***Assemblywoman Markey Asks Him to Meet with NY Legislators and Advocates for Reform of Child Sex Abuse Codes; Seeks Help to Convince NY Bishops to Align Their Policies with Vatican and End Opposition to Reform of State’s Archaic Statute of Limitations***

Assemblywoman Margaret Markey has asked Pope Francis to schedule a meeting with New York survivors of childhood sexual abuse when he comes to the U.S. in September.

After news that the Holy Father has planned to visit New York City in September she wrote to him saying: “Some of us who have been outspoken in the struggle to provide support and justice for survivors of child sexual abuse would like to meet with you to ask for your help in convincing New York Bishops to bring their views in alignment with yours on the subject of abuse.

She said that meeting with key members of the New York State Legislature and representatives of organizations that are hard at work to update the laws of our state “would provide a symbolic opportunity to the general public and New York clergy about the importance of this issue.“

The Assemblywoman has not yet received an official response to her request, but she said this visit is a unique opportunity for the Catholic Church to take leadership in addressing the crisis in how poorly New York treats victims of childhood sexual abuse. The state currently ranks among the very worst of all states in America in how it deals with victims of child sexual abuse crimes, right at the bottom of all 50 states along with Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi and Indiana, according to a survey by the Cardozo Law School.

Under current law victims of child sex abuse in New York must come forward to bring criminal or civil charges within five years of their 18th birthday or lose the opportunity to ever bring charges against their abuser. Many other states either have no or extended statute of limitations, including California, Hawaii, Massachusetts, Delaware and Connecticut.

The Child Victims Act of New York (A2872-Markey/S63-Hoylman) seeks to completely eliminate the civil and criminal statute of limitations for childhood sexual abuse crimes. In addition, it would completely remove the civil statute of limitations for one year in order to give older victims an opportunity to get justice and expose predators who have been hidden and remain free to abuse new generations of children.

The New York Catholic Conference of Bishops has been among the most vociferous opponents of the Child Victims Act since it was first advanced in the State Legislature. The measure has been adopted in one form or another by the Assembly four times since 2006, but has never come to the floor of the State Senate.

In her letter to Pope Francis, the Assemblywoman said, “Those of us in New York who are battling the scourge of childhood sexual abuse were encouraged by your strong message… to the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors. We took particular note of your call to open pathways of reconciliation and healing for those who have been abused and your reminder that there is no place in the ministry for those who abuse children…. This is a view that resonates strongly in America, where there have been several notorious examples of cover-up over recent years that have revealed how abusers of children have been hidden by clergy and often remained free to continue their despicable crimes.”

She added, “In New York, as in many states in America, the fight to address childhood sexual abuse has often revolved around reforming archaic statutes of limitations that restrict the ability of victims to get justice for the crimes done against them by abusers and the organizations that have protected them. Unfortunately, Catholic Bishops have been among the most vocal opponents of reform of these statutes in so many states, particularly in New York. In fact, the opposition to reform of New York’s statutes of limitations has been largely mounted by the Bishops of our own state. This opposition appears to directly contradict the reforms in the Church’s own changes in Canon Law in 2001, 2003 and 2010 relating to statues of limitations and as well as your own views on the subject expressed over the past several months.”

The national organization, the Catholic Whistleblowers, has targeted reform of New York’s codes as a priority in 2015. The group of canon law experts and religious leaders contends that all criminal and civil statutes of limitations for child sexual abuse should be removed so as to better protect children and to do justice. In a recent message to the Bishops of New York State, they point to changes in the church’s own statute of limitations concerning both the crime of sexual abuse of a minor and also actions to recover compensation for damages incurred because of the crime. The statement by the group’s Steering Committee said, “Now therefore, is the time for the Catholic Bishops of New York State to follow the example of Saint John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI and voice support for the Child Victims Act to become Law in New York State.”

***For media information, call Assemblywoman Markey’s Office, Mike Armstrong, 718-651-3185, 518-455-4755,*** [***armmic@earthlink.net***](mailto:armmic@earthlink.net)***.***

***Contacts for the Catholic Whistleblowers: Rev. James Connell (414-940-8054);*** [***Sr. Sally Butler, OP***](http://www.catholicwhistleblowers.org/profiles.htm#Butler) ***(718-237-0905)***

**Following is the text of Assemblywoman Markey’s letter to Pope Francis:**

***His Holiness, Pope Francis, Apostolic Palace, 00120 Vatican City***

***Most Holy Father:***

***Those of us in New York who are battling the scourge of childhood sexual abuse were encouraged by your strong message of February 2, 2015, to the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors. We took particular note of your call to open pathways of reconciliation and healing for those who have been abused and your reminder that there is no place in the ministry for those who abuse children.***

***Reports after the first meeting of the Commission said there was a strong sentiment for recommendations to hold bishops accountable for cover-ups or failing to prevent abuse. This is a view that resonates strongly in America, where there have been several notorious examples of cover-up over recent years that have revealed how abusers of children have been hidden by clergy and often remained free to continue their despicable crimes.***

***In New York, as in many states in America, the fight to address childhood sexual abuse has often revolved around reforming archaic statutes of limitations that restrict the ability of victims to get justice for the crimes done against them by abusers and the organizations that have protected them. Unfortunately, Catholic Bishops have been among the most vocal opponents of reform of these statutes in so many states, particularly in New York.***

***In fact, the opposition to reform of New York’s statutes of limitations has been largely mounted by the Bishops of our own state. This opposition appears to directly contradict the reforms in the Church’s own changes in Canon Law in 2001, 2003 and 2010 relating to statues of limitations and as well as your own views on the subject expressed over the past several months.***

***We are all delighted to know that you will be coming to New York City in September. Some of us who have been outspoken in the struggle to provide support and justice for survivors of child sexual abuse would like to meet with you to ask for your help in convincing New York Bishops to bring their views in alignment with yours on the subject of abuse.***

***Meeting with key members of the New York State Legislature and representatives of organizations that are hard at work to update the laws of our state would provide a symbolic opportunity to the general public and New York clergy about the importance of this issue.***

***New York ranks among the very worst of the 50 American states in how it deals with child sex abuse crimes and opposition of New York Bishops continues to prolong the agony of victims, delay justice for them, and leave perpetrators free to continue their abuse.***

***Respectfully, Margaret M. Markey***

***CC: Cardinal Sean O’Malley, Archbishop of Boston, Chair of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors***