

A newly revealed letter indicating Roman Catholic Church officials knew about allegations that a priest was abusing children in 1956 opens the door to additional lawsuits against the Diocese of Portland by victims who previously were shut out by the state's statute of limitations, a lawyer said Tuesday.

The 2005 letter, revealed in a lawsuit, indicates the late Bishop Daniel Feeney knew about abuse allegations against the Rev. James Vallely earlier than church officials previously acknowledged, which could lead to fraudulent concealment lawsuits, Boston lawyer Mitchell Garabedian said.

"The production of this document opens a whole new window for clergy sexual abuse victims to file lawsuits, obtain validation, and try to heal," Garabedian said.

Bishop Robert P. Deeley declined to discuss specifics of the allegations but acknowledged church officials who failed to act to stop abuse made mistakes.

"We do not want to forget. Remembering keeps us vigilant in our effort to reform. We cannot change the past, but we can do everything possible to see that history does not repeat itself," he said in a statement.

Garabedian, who brought a lawsuit against the Rev. John Geoghan that sparked the church abuse scandal in Boston, said the [Maine](#) lawsuit that produced the letter was settled for the "low six figures." He said he is representing five of Vallely's victims from the 1960s and 1970s who are now eligible to sue.

The handwritten letter was penned by the Rev. Richard Rice in July 2005, several weeks after the Diocese of Portland announced it had validated sexual abuse allegations against nine dead priests including Vallely.

Vallely died in 1997 in [Florida](#).

In the letter, Rice recounted abuse allegations made by another priest to Rev. Marc Caron, who was co-chancellor of the diocese in 2005. The Rev. Dick Harvey, who died earlier that year, had reportedly told Rice that five boys in a Bangor parish confided to him that they were sexually abused by Vallely; Harvey said he informed Feeney of the allegations and that Vallely was transferred to a Portland parish "within a very brief time."

Rice did not return a message left seeking comment at a parish where works.

Robert Hoatson, president of Road to Recovery Inc., a New Jersey-based nonprofit that helps clergy sexual abuse victims, said it's troubling that the letter came to light 10 years after it was mailed.

"The church has not learned any lesson at all. The church is still keeping secrets," said Hoatson, who says his organization has helped about 3,000 clergy sex abuse victims from around the world.