

Australians push for Vatican cardinal to testify on abuse

Rosie Scammell Religion News Service | May. 22, 2015
Vatican City

More than 55,000 people have signed a petition calling for Cardinal George Pell to return to his native Australia and face a government commission on child sex abuse after allegations that he tried to bribe the victim of a pedophile priest.

Addressed to Pope Francis, the Change.org petition calls for Pell -- the Vatican's financial chief and former archbishop of Sydney -- to answer questions from Australia's Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

Appearing in person at the government inquiry is necessary in order to "see and listen to the pain of the victims first hand and explain his actions and decisions," the petition says.

Calls for the cardinal to testify in Australia follow allegations made earlier this week by the nephew of Gerald Ridsdale, an imprisoned abusive priest, who said Pell tried to silence him after he disclosed suffering sexual abuse.

David Ridsdale told the commission on Wednesday that Pell tried to bribe him after hearing of the abuse over 20 years ago.

Some of those who have so far signed the online petition said members of their family had been abused by Gerald Ridsdale. "My father was one of his victims who lived a very tormented life, he passed away three years ago after years of drowning his thoughts with alcohol," one person wrote.

Pell on Wednesday denied the bribery accusations and said he did not try to move Ridsdale between parishes in order to cover up the abuse.

"At no time did I attempt to bribe David Ridsdale or his family or offer any financial inducements for him to be silent. At the time of our discussion the police were already aware of allegations against Gerald Ridsdale and were investigating," he said in a statement.

Pell said he was "horrified" by survivors' accounts and described the acts of abuse as "profoundly evil and completely repugnant to me."

The Australian cardinal, whom Francis brought to Rome to implement reform of the Vatican's finances, said he would respond to any requests from investigators with further written statements.

Pell gave video testimony to the commission in August, during which he said the church should not be held responsible for the actions of clergy.



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