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news from assemblywoman **MARGARET M. MARKEY** 30TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

MY PLEA TO POPE FRANCIS: Please Ask Your NY Bishops to Follow Your Lead on Child Sex Abuse Offences to Show Mercy for Survivors

NY is Among the Worst States in all America for How Victims Are Treated and NY's Bishops are the Biggest Roadblock to Reform of Our Archaic Statute of Limitations

BY ASSEMBLYWOMAN MARGARET M. MARKEY

Amid the excitement over the momentous U.S. visit of Pope Francis this month, little attention has been directed to one of the most urgent topics of concern among many New York Catholics: the scourge of childhood sexual abuse.

One in five American children are victims of this abuse, most by family, acquaintances or others they trust and respect. We read reports from several major U.S. Catholic dioceses that abusers include clergy and others within their orbit.

Even though these cases may only be a small percentage of the total, the systematic cover-up and protection of abusers has brought shame to the Catholic Church as notorious examples reveal how church leaders have hidden pedophiles, sometimes even leaving them free to continue their despicable crimes.

Those of us in New York who are battling this scourge were encouraged this year by the strong message of Pope Francis to his Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors. We took particular note of his reminder that there is no place in the ministry for abusers and his call to open pathways of reconciliation and healing for past victims of abuse. Then he created a Vatican Tribunal to hold bishops accountable for cover-ups or failing to prevent abuse within their jurisdictions. His views, backed up by his actions, were warmly greeted here.

In New York, as in many states, the fight to address childhood sexual abuse and get justice for survivors has been directed at reform of archaic statutes of limitations (SOLs) that restrict the time for victims to report crimes against them by abusers and the organizations that hid or protected them.

Under current law NY victims of child sex abuse must come forward to bring criminal or civil charges within five years after their 18th birthday. Otherwise they forever lose the opportunity. Extensive, creditable research shows, however, that many if not most abuse survivors do not come to grips with what happened to them until well into adulthood, if ever.

The U.S. Justice Department says only 10 percent of child sex abuse cases are ever reported. To whittle away at the other 90 percent, a national movement to reform statute of limitations laws, state-by-state, has seen many expanding or eliminating statute of

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limitations codes to give survivors more time to come forward. These include California, Hawaii, Massachusetts, Delaware and Connecticut.

New York however, currently ranks among the very worst states in all of America for 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 Cardozo Law School of Yeshiva University.

To bring New York out of its bottom ranking, Senator Brad Hoylman and I introduced the Child Victims Act of New York (A2872A/S63A). It will completely eliminate the civil statute of limitations for childhood sexual abuse crimes in the future. In addition, it will suspend the civil statute for one year to give older victims an opportunity to get justice. Equally important, it will also expose predators that have been hidden and remain free to abuse new generations of children.

Even though the measure has strong support in the Assembly, it faces resistance in the State Senate and the most vocal opponent of this SOL reform is the New York Catholic Conference of Bishops. According to Catholic Whistleblowers, a distinguished group of religious leaders and canon law experts, this opposition directly contradicts the reforms in the Church's own changes in Canon Law in 2001, 2003 and 2010 relating to statutes of limitations and as well as the views expressed by Pope Francis on the subject.

Earlier this year I wrote to His Holiness Pope Francis and asked for his help in convincing the Bishops of New York to follow his lead. Reforming the statute of limitations for child sexual abuse will better protect children in the future and bring justice and relief to older victims who continue to suffer from the long-lasting effects of what they endured at the hands of abusers.

After Washington, Pope Francis will visit two states in America. One, Pennsylvania, has taken significant steps over recent years to reform its SOL codes to make them better for children and survivors. New York is a very different story.

I respectfully plead with Pope Francis to intervene with New York Bishops, to melt their hearts, to convince them to adopt his own message of healing and reconciliation toward survivors of child sexual abuse. With New York as one of the very worst states in America for how it treats victims of child sex abuse, it is the Bishops of New York State who are the biggest roadblock to changing that.

There is no limit to what is a lifetime of suffering for many survivors of abuse and there should be no limit on the ability of society to hold abusers accountable. Eliminating New York's statute of limitations for these crimes will provide justice for victims and expose those pedophiles that have been hidden by institutions like his church. I ask the Holy Father to melt the hearts of his New York Bishops so they can be transformed from opponents into supporters of statute of limitations reform.

--- September 23, 2015

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Assemblywoman Margaret Markey (D-Maspeth), is the prime sponsor of the Child Victims Act of NY (A2872A/S63A), which would eliminate the civil statute of limitations for child sexual abuse offenses. The act has been adopted four times in the Assembly, but has never come to the floor of the State Senate for a vote.

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