

Oppose Unfair Retroactive Statutes of Limitation Amendments

May 26, 2016

The Catholic Church has learned hard lessons regarding child sexual abuse and has taken responsibility for the abuse that has occurred within its ranks. The dioceses across Pennsylvania have implemented changes that offer assistance to abuse survivors and affirm that they are not at fault for the crime committed against them.

The Church has also taken great strides to protect children and provide financial assistance for survivors and their families, no matter how long ago the crime was committed, and for as long as necessary. Children and adults are trained to recognize and report signs of abuse to ensure that the children in our care are safe and secure. To date, Pennsylvania's dioceses have spent over \$16.6 million to provide compassionate and supportive victim assistance to individuals and families. [Learn more about the Catholic Church's assistance for survivors here.](#)

Despite that, state lawmakers are considering legislation that would retroactively nullify the statute of limitations for filing a civil lawsuit alleging childhood sexual abuse. It would force parishes, dioceses, schools, and charities to defend cases that are 20, 30, or 40 years old, long after the perpetrator and possible witnesses have died or clear evidence is gone. It could lead to the closure of parishes, schools, and ministries of today's Catholics, who are in no way responsible for abuse that occurred decades ago.

[Pennsylvania's 3 million Catholics cannot afford to defend their parishes and Catholic schools from expensive and unfair lawsuits. Click here to send a message to your legislators.](#)

As proposed, a retroactive nullification of the civil statute of limitations for sexual abuse cases would open a floodgate for lawsuits against private and nonprofit organizations, but it would not apply to public schools or government agencies. Public entities would still be able to claim sovereign immunity from lawsuits, even though the vast majority of Pennsylvania students – 83 percent – attend public school. Survivors abused in public schools, juvenile detention facilities, or county foster care programs could not bring suits under the legislation.

Measures that nullified the civil statute of limitations in other states drained billions of dollars from current ministries, parishes, schools and dioceses. Bankruptcy and severe debt was the only option for most dioceses in the states with retroactive windows. In Delaware, where a retroactive law was adopted, more than half of the individual parishes in the state were sued. One parish in Delaware was hit with a verdict of over \$3 million. Very few could afford to go to court; none were able to defend themselves on their own. Financially, they had no choice but to join a group settlement without establishing the facts of individual cases.

Sexual abuse is a serious crime that affects every institution and community in Pennsylvania, public and private. Because of its gravity, it needs to be dealt with comprehensively and fairly.

Any discussion of a legislative remedy must protect all children, not simply penalize some institutions.

[Everyone who values our parishes, schools and charitable organizations must urge their state lawmakers to oppose unfair changes to the civil statute of limitations. Click here to send a message today.](#)



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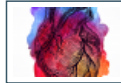
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