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REP. MARK ROZZI: Never-ending Penn State cover-up

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Did Joe know? News accounts indicate that a Penn State insurer claimed “in 1976, a child allegedly reported to PSU’s Head Coach Joseph Paterno that he (the child) was sexually molested by Sandusky.” Apparently the victim depositions are under seal. What else is new?

The biggest thing that jumps out to me is this allegation was in 1976. The Second Mile was founded in 1977. If true, Paterno knew an abuser was founding a charity for kids and it would be on the campus and facilities of Penn State University.

The family’s response is predictable. “An allegation now about an alleged event 40 years ago, as represented by a single line in a court document regarding an insurance claim, with no corroborating evidence, does not change the facts. Joe Paterno did not, at any time, cover up conduct by Jerry Sandusky.”

Did Joe know? Who knows? But the pattern and practices of institutional-based abuse and cover-up is never-ending, with the way our statute of limitation laws protect pedophiles and the organizations that shield them.

Pennsylvania has the distinction of conducting the most grand juries in the country with respect to child sex abuse. Three were empaneled out of the Philadelphia Archdiocese alone. Anyone reading those reports got an education in how priests’ abuse histories, locked in the so-called “secret archives” along with the unmitigated mismanagement of the diocesan hierarchy, added up to catastrophe for hundreds, maybe thousands of children.

The now-familiar shuffling of priests among parishes after decades-old reports of abuse and the callousness of the bishops was brought out when Attorney General Kathleen Kane announced the devastating facts and conclusions in March from the Altoona-Johnstown diocese grand jury report. We’re told there’s more to come.

I’ve called on the district attorneys to pursue cultures of abuse where multiple allegations have been reported and children are at risk. The Bucks County District Attorney’s Office should be releasing its grand jury report on the investigation into the serial abuse and cover-up at the prestigious prep school, Solebury School -- another example of an organization more interested in protecting their reputation, legacy and assets over the well-being of children entrusted to their care.

The only body that has the ability to reverse this epidemic of institutional abuse and cover-up is the Pennsylvania General Assembly. The public wants this nonsense to end.

My colleagues in the House heeded the call and on April 12, House Bill 1947 was overwhelmingly passed 180-15. The bill was referred to the Senate Judiciary Committee on April 28. It is time for the members of the Senate to step up to the plate and get H.B. 1947 passed NOW and on to the governor. We’ve all waited long enough.

State Rep. Mark Rozzi is a Democrat who represents the 126th House District in parts of Berks County. He is a leading proponent of legislation safeguarding children from sexual predators.

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