

THOMAS P. DOYLE, J.C.D., C.A.D.C.

9700 WOODLAND GLEN COURT, VIENNA, VIRGINIA 22182

September 9, 2009

Dear Senator,

I am writing in support of the proposed legislation, S-5893, the Child Victims Act. I am a Catholic priest. I have worked intensely with victims of sexual abuse for 25 years. Most of my experience has been with the victims of Catholic clergy. In time I became involved with victims of clergy of other denominations and victims of other classes of perpetrators including teachers, Scout leaders and family members.

The legislation is essential for a number of cogent reasons including the fact that it will serve to expose perpetrators from all professions who have escaped any form of accountability due to the protection of the statute of limitations. In California the passage of similar legislation was instrumental in identifying approximately 300 child sexual abusers who otherwise would have gone unchecked and ruined the lives of countless more children.

I believe the legislation is essential as well because unlike the victims of certain other crimes, those who have been violated sexually as children or as adolescents are so scarred emotionally and psychologically that they cannot disclose their abuse for many years after until they feel safe. The intense feelings of guilt, shame, isolation and fear trap these people inside a cocoon of terror. The limitations on the Statute of Limitations are based on grossly inaccurate information about the effects of childhood sexual abuse. The experts from the behavioral sciences who have both worked with victims and have researched the issue are in agreement as to the overpowering impact of sexual violation. It is ironic that the information offered by these experts, information based on experience and hard scientific evidence, is often challenged by private and public institutions that have hidden or otherwise enabled sexual abusers from their ranks. These institutions prefer to protect their financial security, their corporate image and the reputations of members over the welfare of the children whom they have tragically harmed for life.

Children who are violated sexually are robbed of their formative years, their adolescence and often of any meaningful adulthood. In many instances I have seen that the civil process whereby the victims are validated and believed has a profound healing effect. The primary and most important outcome is not a significant monetary award for a victim but the validation by the community which is a major impetus to

recovery. Equally important is the identification of perpetrators who have escaped justice and the message to other potential perpetrators that the law will no longer protect them.

The Catholic bishops of New York have waged a brutal campaign to defeat any legislation that would help future victims of childhood sexual abuse. They have framed the issue as though it were an attack on the Catholic Church aimed at crippling its financial base. They have tried to deflect the issue by claiming that legislation will single out the Catholic Church while it ignores abuse in other institutions. One bishop even threatened to close churches in the districts of legislators who voted for the bill. All of the Catholic bishops' extreme efforts are self-serving and grounded in false information.

Child sexual abuse is not exclusively a *Catholic* issue. However the revelations of extensive clergy sexual abuse and the blatant cover-up by Church leaders have provoked a sharply increased awareness of the almost unbelievable extent of child sexual abuse in our society. Demanding accountability of Catholic Church leaders or those of any other denomination certainly does not amount to discrimination against the denomination. No Church or Church official is allowed to harm children or to aid those who harm children, simply because he or she is a member of a Church. That clearly is not what the First Amendment is all about.

The Catholic bishops who claim that passage of the bill will result in a flood of cases which will bankrupt the Church are using untruthful scare tactics. Several dioceses in other States have filed for Chapter 11 protection yet none has claimed insolvency and all are financially secure. The passage of a similar bill in California did not have any negative impact on the Church's financial base. In the time between the passing of the California bill and the year 2007 three of the dioceses with the greatest number of cases, Los Angeles, Orange and Oakland, all constructed new cathedral Churches at costs of \$129 million, \$115 million and \$126 million respectively. None of the threats issued by the New York bishops or their highly paid lobbyists and attorneys are grounded in even a shred of reality.

I have worked with thousands of victims of childhood sexual abuse. I have experienced first-hand what it does to a victim and to the victim's family because my youngest niece was severely assaulted at age 14 and still suffers the devastating after-effects seven years later. It is scandalous and outrageous that organized Churches or any other public or private institution in our country should actively campaign to deny present victims their right to justice and hopefully a meaningful life. It is equally outrageous that such institutions should fight so viciously to deny a secure future for the children of tomorrow.

Sincerely,

(Rev.) Thomas P. Doyle, J.C.D., C.A.D.C.