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N.Y. Cath. Conf. rejects amended abuse lawsuit bill

by Catholic News Service

ALBANY, N.Y. -- Even with an amendment to include public institutions, a bill that would temporarily waive statutes of limitations on filing sex abuse lawsuits "remains terrible public policy," said the New York State Catholic Conference in Albany.

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tAs originally written, the Child Victims Act of New York -- also known as the Markey bill after sponsor Democratic Assemblywoman Margaret Markey -- applied only to suits against individuals and private institutions.

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tOn June 3 Markey said she would amend her proposal to include public institutions.

"After several years of denying the fact that her bill would exempt public institutions, Mrs. Markey has now acknowledged that her original bill did just that. However, even this amended bill remains terrible public policy for the state," said Richard E. Barnes, executive director of the New York State Catholic Conference, said in a June 4 statement.

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tMarkey's bill "could easily result in hundreds of billions of dollars in settlements against all entities, public and private, in every corner of our state. Clearly, such staggering numbers make this legislation a matter of grave consequence and intense public interest," Barnes said.

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tThe New York Times reported that Markey decided to amend the bill after fellow lawmakers who support the measure told her their constituents felt it was unfair if it only applied to private institutions.

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tShe said in a statement: "I think the vigorous debate we've had this year has made this a better bill."

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tIn March the Catholic conference, which represents the state's bishops in matters of public policy,

mounted a statewide campaign to educate people about the Markey bill. The measure also would lengthen the period in which alleged victims may sue over child sexual abuse in the future.

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tNew York's current statute of limitations requires alleged victims of child sex abuse to file civil lawsuits by the time they are 23.

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tBarnes said the Catholic conference opposed the bill for several reasons, "namely that statutes of limitation exist in law for a good reason and that it is impossible to defend (against) decades-old claims."

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tBy allowing lawsuits to be filed against the church and other nonprofits, the measure also would "seriously impact" the ability of the church and other nonprofit entities "to provide health care, social services and education programs to the citizens of the state."

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tBy applying it only to private institutions, Markey's bill was "inherently unfair," Barnes said. Now, with an amendment to include public institutions, it will hurt not only the church "but also public school districts, public health care institutions, state agencies, counties, cities and towns, as well as their insurers," he said.

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