NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

Catholics fight bid to lift statute of limitations on abuse

Matt Friedman Ginger Gibson The Star-Ledger | Dec. 9, 2010

TRENTON, N.J. -- New Jersey lawmakers on Thursday (Dec. 9) will consider a bill that would eliminate any statute of limitations on when sex abuse victims can sue?and allow them to take action against clergy, educators and others who knew about abuse and did nothing to stop it.

Under current state law, victims can sue their abuser or a parent or guardian who knew about the abuse and allowed it to occur. The bill also would allow victims to sue those who had ?supervisory or disciplinary power? but did nothing about the abuse.

?The current process presents real obstacles for the victim that are unfair,? said state Sen. Joseph Vitale, a Democratic sponsor of the bill that will be considered by the state Senate Judiciary Committee.

?For those who discover their abuse later on in life, this will give them a greater opportunity to bring a civil action against an individual and the institutions that harbor the criminals.?

Advocates for abuse victims said they often take years to gather the courage to come forward with their stories, and often suffer posttraumatic stress disorder and depression.

?It?s allowing survivors to have their day in court,? said Mark Crawford, who was molested by a priest as a teen and now runs the New Jersey chapter of the Survivors Network for those Abused by Priests.

Patrick R. Brannigan, executive director of the New Jersey Catholic Conference, plans to testify against the bill.

?Statutes of limitations exist for a reason. It?s not only in such heinous actions as sex abuse, but in all civil actions. As time goes on, memories fade, people die, records are lost,? Brannigan said.

?From a legal perspective, the statutes exist to assure that there is fairness in the judicial process and that there are speedy trials. This bill will not protect a single child. This is backward-looking, not forward-looking.?

The bill was introduced three weeks before *The Star-Ledger* published a report that concluded Newark Archbishop John J. Myers shielded at least four priests accused of sexual abuse.

?It?s not necessarily specifically targeting the church,? said committee chairman Nicholas Scutari, another Democratic co-sponsor. ?Although I think the church was in the forefront of this in recent events.?

Michael Drewniak, a spokesman for Gov. Chris Christie, would not say whether the governor would sign the bill if it reaches his desk. ?Like all legislation, we will take a very close look at it to make sure it is constitutional and all legal issues are addressed,? he said.

The Next Step FORWARD

DONATE NOW [1]

Enjoy this article?
Help support more like it by **donating today!** [1]

Source URL (retrieved on *08/05/2015 - 09:05*): http://ncronline.org/news/accountability/catholics-fight-bid-lift-statute-limitations-abuse

Links:
[1] http://ncrnews.org/webathon/donate/article-end