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New Orleans — May 28, 2020

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An advocate for people abused by priests asked Gov. John Bel Edwards on May 26 to direct the Louisiana State Police to conduct a statewide investigation of the Catholic church for its role in child sexual abuse cases.

Richard Windmann, leader of the state chapter of Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests, made the formal request in a letter. He said his group had previously asked Attorney General Jeff Landry to "begin an impartial and secular investigation into cases of serial abuse and cover-up, but he is unwilling to help."

Landry has said that he is unable to help unless a local district attorney asks for assistance, Windmann said. Landry has also stated that state police is the appropriate agency for such an investigation, he said.

"But it is a serious problem when the district attorney in Lafayette says on public TV that he doesn't have to do an investigation because 'the church has already done their investigation.' It is a huge problem when our state law recognizes and bows down to canon law. The church has proven time and time again that it is not capable of policing itself," Windmann said.

Edwards' office did not immediately respond to an emailed request for comment May 27.

The request comes after the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of New Orleans announced earlier this month that it is seeking federal Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection amid growing legal costs related to sexual abuse by priests. It's the latest of more than 20 dioceses nationwide to take such action.

Windmann said police in Houston and Dallas have started their own investigations into such abuse cases and attorney generals in Michigan, New Jersey, California and Pennsylvania have done the same.

"In the event that you will entertain our request, I can refer your office and the state police to several officers of the court that can provide irrefutable documentation that the rape of our children was organized, systematic, institutionalized, intentionally covered up, and that there is a cover up of the actual cover up," Windmann said.

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