



Victims of clergy sexual abuse, or their family members, react as Pennsylvania Attorney General Josh Shapiro speaks during a news conference at the Pennsylvania Capitol in Harrisburg on Aug. 14, 2018. A Pennsylvania grand jury's investigation of clergy sexual abuse identified more than 1,000 child victims in the state. The grand jury report said that number comes from records in six Roman Catholic dioceses. (AP/Matt Rourke)



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Over two decades, Catholic dioceses, eparchies and men's religious communities spent more than \$5 billion on allegations of sexual abuse of minors, according to a new report released Wednesday (Jan. 15) by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate at Georgetown University.

Between 2004 and 2023, three-fourths of the \$5.025 billion reported was paid to abuse victims. Seventeen percent went to pay attorneys' fees, 6% was in support for alleged abusers and 2% went toward other costs. On average, only 16% of the costs related to the allegations was borne by insurance companies.

The CARA report combined 20 annual surveys sent to dioceses and eparchies within the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (which excludes some parts of the U.S., such as Puerto Rico, Guam and American Samoa), as well as U.S. religious communities belonging to the Conference of Major Superiors of Men. The report does note that some alleged perpetrators were assigned outside the U.S. The USCCB commissioned the survey in 2004.

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Jonathon Wiggins, a lead researcher on the report, told RNS that the report represented the Catholic Church's superlative commitment to transparency. The report "is unprecedented by any non-governmental organization and is the largest effort of its kind," the report's authors wrote in a statement.

Wiggins told RNS that this report may have some overlap in cases with the groundbreaking 2004 research study on the nature and scope of sexual abuse in the

church, conducted by the John Jay College of Criminal Justice, but that it has a different methodology.

During the 20 years of the survey, the respondents reported 16,276 credible allegations of sexual abuse of minors by priests, deacons or religious brothers. Those allegations represent slightly less than two-thirds (65%) of total allegations that dioceses, eparchies and men's religious communities reported receiving.

Though the surveys come from the 2000s, the majority of credible allegations were for abuse that began before 1980. Ninety-two percent of credible allegations were for abuse that began before 1989. In contrast, 542 credible allegations represented abuse that began after the year 2000. The report defines credible allegations as bearing the "semblance of truth" and having been sufficiently substantiated to forward the allegations to the Vatican's Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith.

Of the credible allegations, 4 in 5 victims were male, and one-fifth were female. More than half were between the ages of 10 and 14. About a quarter (24%) of victims were between 15 and 17 years old and another 1 in 5 was age 9 or younger.

The response rate for dioceses and eparchies averaged 99%, while men's religious communities had an average response rate of 72%.

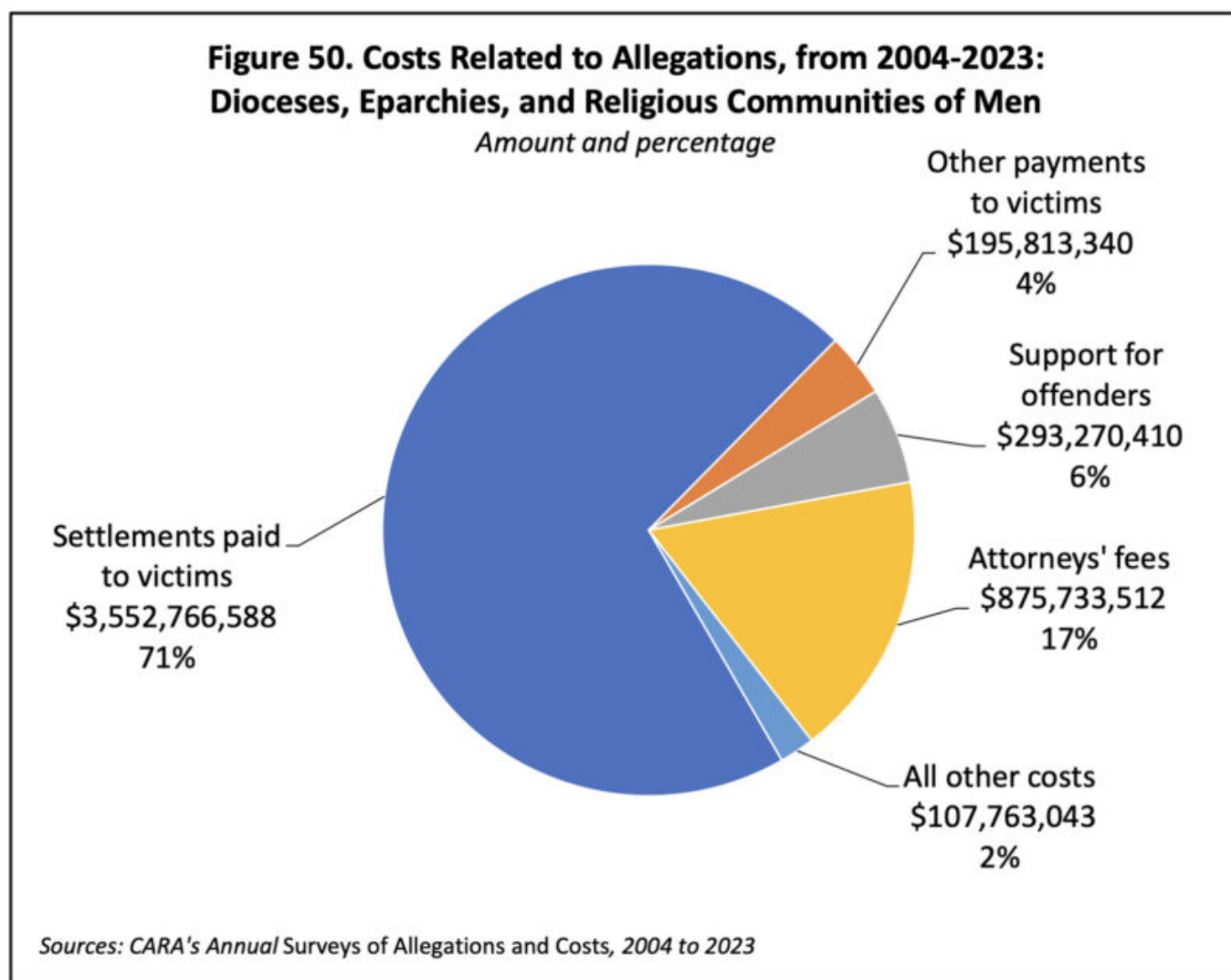
Those financial troubles have led dioceses throughout the country to sell diocesan property, including diocesan headquarters, seminaries, schools and churches. In the Diocese of Rockville Centre, New York, every parish had to pay amounts ranging from five figures to more than \$1 million toward a bankruptcy settlement.

In addition to tracking the money spent on allegations of abuse, the report totals the amount of money spent on abuse prevention, including for safe environment coordinators and victim assistance coordinator salaries, administrative expenses, training programs and background checks, totaling nearly \$728 million.

The report tracks that the abuse prevention expenses have risen over time, with the amount spent from 2014 to 2023 representing an 80% increase compared with the expenses from 2004 to 2013.

The financial costs of the abuse crisis have reshaped the Catholic Church in the United States. Marie T. Reilly, a professor at Pennsylvania State University Law School, has [tracked](#) 40 Catholic dioceses and religious organizations that have sought bankruptcy protection, and many dioceses have cited the expense of settling abuse claims as part of their decision to declare bankruptcy.

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"Costs Related to Allegations, from 2004-2023: Dioceses, Eparchies, and Religious Communities of Men." (Courtesy of CARA)

Of all the survey years, 2019 had the highest number of credible allegations reported, with 2,506 credible allegations reported that year. That year came after a flood of revelations about the extent of sexual abuse in the church.

Many state investigations were opened after an August 2018 Pennsylvania grand jury report [found](#) that there were more than 1,000 victims of child sexual abuse in that state and that Catholic bishops and other leaders had participated in a cover-up.

2018 was also the year that several dioceses [found](#) that the allegation that Cardinal Theodore McCarrick had sexually abused a minor was credible, leading to McCarrick's removal from the clerical state in February 2019.

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Over two decades, the survey's questions changed in ways that may impact the total count of credible allegations. Before 2013, the survey did not include allegations of abuse by religious brothers, who are considered lay people in the Catholic Church.

Before 2016, all allegations were sorted into "credible" and "unsubstantiated/obviously false" categories. In 2016, a third category, "unable to be proven," was introduced, which decreased the proportion of allegations deemed "credible."

Based on the allegations deemed credible, the report estimates 4,490 alleged perpetrators, of whom 80% were diocesan priests, 15% were priests from religious orders, 4% were religious brothers and 1% were deacons.

In the years that the perpetrators were reported by dioceses, eparchies and men's religious communities, 86% of the perpetrators were already dead, removed from ministry, laicized or missing. The other 14% were removed from ministry or retired from ministry during the survey year.