



Department of Justice

Acting United States Attorney Soo C. Song
Western District of Pennsylvania

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U.S. Attorney's Office and Diocese of Altoona-Johnstown Announce Reforms To Protect Children from Sexual Abuse, Provide Counseling and Support for Victims

PITTSBURGH – Acting United States Attorney Soo C. Song and Bishop Mark L. Bartchak of the Diocese of Altoona-Johnstown announced today reforms by the Diocese to protect the children of the Diocese from sexual abuse, ensure that all allegations of sexual abuse are immediately reported to law enforcement and provide victims with access to a full range of counseling and support services.

The reforms are summarized in a memorandum of understanding. The memorandum is the product of extensive collaboration between the Diocese and the U.S. Attorney's Office. Among other core reforms, the memorandum provides for:

- The creation of an independent, multidisciplinary oversight board;
- The retention of an outside expert to develop a new, comprehensive child abuse prevention program;
- A reporting protocol that requires the Diocese to report allegations of child sexual abuse to law enforcement within twelve hours after receipt; and
- Counseling and support services for victims by qualified and independent mental health professionals chosen by the victims.

“These unprecedented reforms put victims first, providing them with access to needed support and counseling,” stated Acting U.S. Attorney Song. “Through this agreement, allegations of sexual abuse will be immediately reported to law enforcement and suspected offenders removed from contact with children.”

“Since the release of the Grand Jury report last year, I have focused on strengthening our commitment to children and youth protection and providing continued support to survivors of sexual abuse,” said Bishop Bartchak. “The framework announced today represents the culmination of those efforts. As we look to the future, I believe these comprehensive and unprecedented reforms will make the Diocese of Altoona-Johnstown a leader in the safety and protection of young people.”

Assistant United States Attorneys Michael A. Comber, Philip P. O'Connor, and Colin J. Callahan handled this matter on behalf of the United States.

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