



Diocese of Altoona-Johnstown

Tony DeGol

Secretary for Communications

925 S. Logan Boulevard

Hollidaysburg, PA 16648

Telephone: (814) 695-5579

Facsimile: (814) 696-9516

Cell: (814) 937-1418

E-mail: tdegol@dioceseaj.org

September 21, 2018

MEDIA ADVISORY

Pennsylvania's Bishops: We Pledge Our Support for Independent Sex Abuse Survivors' Compensation Program

(HOLLIDAYSBURG, PA) – The Catholic Bishops of Pennsylvania issued the following statement today:

Since the release of the grand jury report on August 14, we the Catholic bishops of Pennsylvania have reflected deeply on the ugly record of clergy sexual abuse in our Commonwealth, and on times when Church leadership failed to protect our people over a period of decades.

We fully acknowledge that the Church sometimes failed the most vulnerable among us — children and young adults. We deeply regret the suffering of survivors and any decisions that failed to protect them.

As the Pennsylvania General Assembly returns for the fall legislative session, assuring the protection of children and help for survivors of sexual abuse should rightly be one of its top priorities. As various alternatives and programs are proposed, we will support all reasonable and constitutional efforts focused on helping survivors and their families on a path toward healing.

We recognize our responsibility to provide an opportunity for sexual abuse survivors whose cases are time-barred from pursuing civil claims to share their experiences, identify their abusers, and receive compensation to assist their healing and recovery.

To that end, we commit ourselves to creating or participating in an independent, voluntary program that will include a panel of qualified experts to review individual cases and determine financial assistance. We understand that this compensation program will require substantial fiscal commitment and all dioceses will be seriously impacted. We stress that it is most important for all experts serving on this panel to be independent of the influence of the Church or of any institution in which children may have been abused.

We believe such a program will expedite the process for survivors to present their cases to experienced, compassionate experts who will determine an outcome for each case in a swift, efficient manner. In doing so, the panel will provide a resolution to survivors and allow them to avoid difficult and prolonged litigation. We believe an independent panel is the best option, considering a window or reviver of the statute of limitations will inevitably result in bankruptcy

for dioceses. Bankruptcy would cripple the ability of a diocese to provide compensation and healing for survivors, while vastly reducing or eliminating social service programs that greatly benefit all Pennsylvanians by serving some of the most at-risk people in our communities.

We hope that as the program develops it will be open to any youth service organization, private or public, to opt into it to fulfill its obligations to survivors of abuse. We welcome legislative support for such a program.

We cannot undo the harm that childhood sexual abuse has caused, but in humility and repentance we hope the path forward offers a way toward healing for survivors and their families.