

BILL ALLOWS EXEMPTION

The outcome was in doubt but reason prevailed. A law governing child sexual abuse in Connecticut allowed for an exemption for allegations heard in the confessional.

In the first part of May, the Connecticut state House passed a bill that would require Catholic priests to report allegations of child sexual abuse disclosed in the confessional. But then the state Senate struck down this provision arguing that an exemption must be made for the confessional. The final fate of the bill was determined on May 8. The exemption was allowed.

The Catholic League entered the fray by calling on all legislators to provide for the exemption. "Not to do so," we said, "would be to allow the legitimate concerns over child sexual abuse to devolve into a church-state scandal of its own." We called attention to the fact that "it has long been respected that what is said between a penitent and a priest is no one else's business. That would certainly include agents of the state."

While we were happy with the final outcome, we were disturbed that the bill passed by the state House—the one that did not allow for an exemption for the confessional—was 144-2. Constitutional guarantees should not be suspended simply because of an ensuing scandal.

We also expressed our concerns over reports that an anti-Catholic tone was evident during the debate in the House. There is no excuse for bigotry.