

CALIFORNIA BILL STALLS; CATHOLIC RESPONSE IS HUGE

Over the summer, the Catholic League contacted well over 10,000 members in California alerting them to a vote on a bill in the Assembly Appropriations Committee that unfairly targets the Catholic Church. We also emailed over a thousand pastors throughout the state. It was worth the effort. On August 14, the bill failed 6-4; there were seven abstentions. At press time, the bill was eligible for reconsideration at the end of August, but the fact that it stalled in committee is a good sign.

As Catholic Californians know, the bill has been deceitfully promoted as a measure to combat the sexual abuse of minors. But it does nothing of the sort. It would suspend the statute of limitations for one year in cases where someone claims he was molested when he was a minor in a private institution; it would apply to those who were 26-years-old in 2002.

Amazingly, the bill does not apply to anyone who was violated by a public employee, such as a public school teacher, aide, counselor or coach. For them—and they account for the lion's share of abuse—it's just too bad.

The purpose of this outrageous bill, SB 131, is to sock it to the Catholic Church. In California, lawmakers already suspended the statute of limitations for private institutions; they did so in 2003. But public school teachers have never been subjected to this condition. In other words, the bill is nothing more than a vindictive effort to punish the Catholic Church.

Leading the fight against this bill are the California bishops, and the California Catholic Conference; we are particularly taken by the aggressive leadership of Los Angeles

Archbishop José Gomez. We are proud to play a support role, and we thank our California members for their participation in this effort. But this fight is not over.

If California lawmakers are truly serious about combating the sexual abuse of minors (most surely are), then they should a) not make exceptions for private or public institutions and b) concentrate on current cases of abuse. To do any less—to carve out a privileged position for some, or to focus on the past, not the present—is an exercise in grandstanding. That's not leadership.

This game has been played in other states as well. We've fought attempts to discriminate against the Catholic Church in Colorado and New York, and our side has prevailed. Rest assured knowing we are not walking away from this fight in California.

When it comes to protecting kids, we don't need one law for some, and another for others. And we sure don't need laws driven by an animus against the Catholic Church. It is astonishing to think that in 2013, Catholics still have to fight for basic human rights.