

# COLORADO LAWMAKERS RETHINK ABUSE BILLS

In the last edition of *Catalyst*, we reported that Colorado lawmakers were considering three bills that would lift the statutes of limitation for child sexual abuse lawsuits as they apply to Catholic priests. The three Colorado bishops, led by Denver Archbishop Charles Chaput, fought these measures, as did the Catholic League. Bill Donohue wrote to all members of the Colorado legislature saying the bills were discriminatory. Fortunately, there's been a breakthrough.

On March 14, House Bill 1088 passed by one vote in the Colorado Senate Judiciary Committee. The bill, if approved by the Senate, would remove the statute of limitations for criminal lawsuits, but would not affect civil lawsuits. Importantly, it would cover both private and public entities. These amendments won the endorsement of the state's three bishops.

The real story here is the willingness of the Colorado legislature to give public school employees, and every other segment of the population that works with minors, a pass. Were it not for Archbishop Chaput and others, the lawmakers would have succeeded in crafting a law that would impact only priests. Just as interesting is the reaction of the Colorado education establishment to the revised laws that blanket all entities, including the public schools.

Archbishop Chaput said from the beginning that he had no problem with any law that fairly covered everyone (and neither did the Catholic League). When word got out that Chaput was serious, and lawmakers were rethinking the bills so that they would have uniform application, the teachers unions and their sister organizations took a deep breath. For example, the Colorado Association of School Boards and the Colorado

Association of School Executives said they were “studying” the bills (apparently they’re still studying them since no one has heard from them since) while the Colorado Education Association (CEA) brazenly spoke out against them. As we told the press, what started as a Catholic-bashing crusade “opened Pandora’s box for Colorado’s teachers,” putting them in a “lose-lose situation.”

Truth to tell, the CEA has quite a record dealing with child abusers. In 1997 it spent a small fortune trying to intimidate the parents of children who brought suit against an alleged child molester: the CEA launched a libel suit. According to one media account, the CEA pursued the accusers “as if they were all conspirators in a right-wing plot to overthrow the public education system rather than concerned, fearful parents....”

Rep. Terrance Carroll did the CEA’s bidding. On February 13, he said that amending the bills to include the public schools was just a ruse—he didn’t think the bishops would support any bill that would lift the statute of limitations, even if all entities were covered. Indeed, he said he was ready to “call the Catholic Church’s bluff.” But when the bishops endorsed these revised bills, Carroll exploded the very next day saying their stance “thoroughly disgusts me.” As we said in a news release, “looks like he lost” in his bid to call the Catholic Church’s bluff.

Another issue that came to light recently was the political machinations of those out to get the Catholic Church. Senate President Joan Fitz-Gerald, whose bill would have targeted only the Catholic Church, was working with Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests (SNAP). This group, which has become increasingly unreasonable and hostile to any attempt by Church officials to practice self-defense, put Fitz-Gerald in touch with Yeshiva University law professor Marci Hamilton, a relentless critic of the Catholic Church who represented alleged victims in California. Just connecting the dots is

enough to make one dirty.

This is quite a stew: bigoted lawmakers, self-interested teachers unions, professional victims' groups and vindictive law professors. What all of them have in common is a hostile attitude towards the Catholic Church masked as an interest in child welfare. It's time to call a spade a spade.