

DRACONIAN LAWS PROPOSED; THREE STATES GUILTY

The sex abuse scandal in the Catholic Church has triggered a rash of draconian bills designed to deal with this and related matters. The states most guilty of trying to subordinate the Church to the state are Colorado, Massachusetts and New Hampshire. The Catholic League has been active in opposing the proposed laws in all three states.

In Colorado, three bills are pending that would suspend the statute of limitation for child sexual abuse lawsuits for two years; they even allow some institutions to be sued for vicarious liability. The bills, however, apply only to private entities: public schools are purposely given an exemption.

Colorado's three bishops have spoken against these bills. Bill Donohue wrote a letter to all Colorado lawmakers supporting the bishops in an effort to derail these blatantly unfair pieces of legislation (see pp. 4-5). He asked the lawmakers to either amend these bills so that all institutions are equally covered, or to reject them as discriminatory in both intent and practice.

In Massachusetts, the House and Senate introduced bills, similar in nature, that would require religious organizations to file an annual financial statement with the state. After the Senate version passed, those opposed to this legislation organized to defeat it in the House. They did so handily by a vote of 147-3. But it took a united effort among groups across the religious spectrum to do so. For more on this issue, see p. 6.

New Hampshire is now entertaining a bill that would violate the Sacrament of Reconciliation. The sponsor of the bill, Mary Stuart Gile, maintains that any priest who learns of the

sexual abuse of a child in the confessional is obligated to report the details to the authorities. We squared off against Gile in 2003 when she tried the same maneuver, and we eventually won. Now we're at it again. See p. 6 for a more complete account.

There have been other attempts by state legislators to rein in the Church, but none have gone quite this far. At stake are moral, legal and ecclesiastical issues of the highest magnitude.

None of these proposed bills has yet to become law, and it is not likely that the courts would sustain them if they did. But nothing can be taken for granted in this hostile environment.