

DUPLICITY MARKS MARYLAND SEX ABUSE BILL

Bills were recently introduced in both houses of the Maryland legislature—sponsored by Delores Goodwin Kelley in the Senate and C. Sue Hecht in the House—that would have continued the duplicitous way private and public institutions are treated. We addressed this issue and within a day of our news release, we found out that the bill did not make it out of committee.

Obviously, the Maryland lawmakers that sponsored these bills were not serious about combating child sexual abuse; if they were they would have required the same law be applied to every institution equally, private or public. To be specific, these bills continued the outrageous insulation afforded public schools: under the law, claims are limited to \$100,000 in damages and alleged victims must give notice of a suit within six months. No such cap is awarded to private institutions. In other words, both of these bills would have ratified a dual system of justice.

Sen. Kelley denied that her bill targeted the Catholic Church, and conceded that priests account for “less than two percent of the perpetrators.” Likewise, Delegate Hecht admitted that priests account for “a miniscule number” of offenses. That being the case, it suggests that the real damage is being done elsewhere. And since we know that the sexual abuse of minors is 100 times greater in the public schools than in the Catholic Church, justice demands that the law include public schools as well.

We issued a news release calling out Kelley and Hecht for their duplicity and asked our members to contact Sen. Kelley. In our release we said: “Imagine, for just one moment, what the reaction would be if a law were proposed that would severely penalize public school teachers for sexual abuse but

would give a slap on the wrist to Catholic teachers for the same offense. And imagine what would happen if there were a cap on the amount of damages a victim could extract from Catholic schools, but the public schools could be squeezed for millions.”

Within 24 hours of our news release, we received the news that Kelley’s bill did not make it out of committee, thus rendering it dead. While this is a good sign, there is still the possibility that this bill could rise again. But rest assured, if there is still life in this bill, the Catholic League will be waiting.