

DUPLICITY MARKS MARYLAND SEX ABUSE BILL

Bills have been introduced in both houses of the Maryland legislature that would amend the current law that allows alleged victims of child sexual abuse to file civil suit against the offender up until the age of 25. Under the bills sponsored by Sen. Delores Goodwin Kelley and C. Sue Hecht in the House, the age limit on the statute of limitations would be raised from 25 to 50 years old. The retroactive provision would open up a two-year window during which claims could be made.

Catholic League president Bill Donohue opposes the bills:

“If Maryland lawmakers are serious about combating child sexual abuse, they need to have one law for everyone. They do not, and under the proposed bills, they still will not. To be specific, these bills continue the outrageous insulation afforded the 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 afforded private institutions. In other words, both bills would ratify a dual system of justice.

“Sen. Kelley denies that her bill is targeting the Catholic Church, and she concedes that priests account for ‘less than two percent of perpetrators.’ Likewise, Delegate Hecht admits that priests account for ‘a miniscule number’ of offenses. That being the case, it suggests 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.

“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.”

Contact Delegate Hecht: sue.hecht@house.state.md.us