

# HAWAII GOVERNOR WEIGHS SEX ABUSE BILL

*Bill Donohue wrote the following letter to Hawaii Governor Neil Abercrombie urging him to veto S.B. 2687, a bill that would suspend the statute of limitations for cases involving the sexual abuse of minors:*

May 8, 2014

Hon. Neil Abercrombie  
Governor, State of Hawaii  
Executive Chambers, State Capitol  
Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

Dear Governor Abercrombie:

As president of the nation's largest Catholic civil rights organization, I implore you to veto S.B. 2687.

Justice demands that those who sexually abuse minors should be punished with the full force of the law. Justice also demands that the civil liberties of the accused be respected. Unfortunately, S.B. 2687 does violence to the latter.

In 2012, you signed a bill that allowed a two-year window permitting alleged sexual abuse victims to file a lawsuit for offenses that occurred when they were a minor. It did not apply to the public schools. This bill, S.B. 2687, does apply to the public schools. However, it is clear from those who are pushing for this legislation that its real target is the Catholic Church.

Every student of this issue knows that it is not in the Catholic schools where this problem is extant—it is in the public schools. We know from the John Jay College of Criminal Justice investigation into this matter that almost all of the

cases of the sexual abuse of minors that took place in Catholic institutions occurred between 1965 and 1985. By contrast, in the last five years, the average number of credible accusations made against 40,000 priests is exactly 7.6. Quite frankly, there is no entity in the United States today, private or public, that can match this record.

It could be argued that if the public schools were previously exempted from the suspension of the statute of limitations, S.B. 2687 is a necessary corrective. But the right remedy to this problem is not to violate the civil liberties of any person, independent of whether he or she works in the private sector or the public sector. There are fundamental due process reasons why statutes of limitation exist: memories fade, witnesses die, and determinations of the truth are compromised. The idea that cases can be fairly adjudicated when they extend back decades—even a half-century or more—is ludicrous.

There are plenty of steps that can be taken to protect minors from being abused today. The Catholic Church has implemented the most serious, and effective, measures of any institution in the nation; this accounts for its tremendous progress. Indeed, nothing would do more to curb the sexual abuse of minors today than for non-Catholic entities to adopt the same reforms that the Catholic Church has established.

It is for these reasons that I urge you to veto S.B. 2687.

Sincerely,

William A. Donohue, Ph.D.  
President