

LOUISIANA VICTORY

In 2014, the Catholic League signed an amicus brief in support of a Louisiana priest who refused to disclose to the authorities a conversation he had in the confessional. After losing in the State Supreme Court, the State District Court declared that Louisiana law could not force a priest to violate the seal of confession. Kudos to Catholic Action for Faith and Family, lead counsel in the case, for doing such a great job.

The case began in 2008 when a 14-year-old girl alleged that she told her parish priest that she was abused by a now-deceased lay member of the parish. She said the disclosure came during the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Her parents sued the priest, Fr. Jeff Bayhi, and the Diocese of Baton Rouge, for failing to report the alleged abuse.

Louisiana law requires the clergy to report sexual abuse, but it is inconsistent with regards to the confessional. On the one hand, it grants an exception to what is learned in the confessional, but other parts of the state code contradict this provision.

At issue is a critical First Amendment right: if priests violate the seal of confession, they face excommunication. Fr. Bayhi said he would not testify and would take the risk of going to prison. The diocese stood by him. "We're just always happy when the court upholds religious liberty," Fr. Bayhi said.

We hope courts throughout the nation take note of this important ruling.