

MASSACHUSETTS HIGH COURT REJECTS CLERGY ABUSE LAWSUIT

On April 30, the highest court in Massachusetts, the Supreme Judicial Court, dismissed a lawsuit brought by a woman who claims she was molested by a Catholic priest more than 40 years ago. In doing so, the Supreme Judicial Court overturned a decision by the state's Appeals Court that ruled in favor of the woman.

The decision by the state's highest court said that the statute of limitations had expired. It also said the woman should have filed her lawsuit earlier; she claimed a connection between the abuse and the emotional harm she says she endured.

We immediately sent the following news release to the press:

"It is impossible to say whether the woman in this case was delivered a morally unjust decision today. But one thing is certain: it would have been legally unjust to convict the accused, Rev. Gerard Creighton. The reason why we have a statute of limitations in law is precisely to guard against cases like this. How is the accused—always assumed innocent—supposed to defend himself against accusations made a long time ago (in this instance several decades ago) when witnesses are dead, memories have faded and personal vendettas may be at work?

"The U.S. Supreme Court will confront this issue directly in a case involving a California law that allows clergy sex abuse charges to be filed after the statute of limitations has expired. Right now there is nothing but confusion: last week a judge dropped a case against the Diocese of Palm Beach on statute of limitations grounds (the case also applied to the Diocese of Rockville Centre). And just this week, the first

lawsuit against the Archdiocese of Philadelphia for clergy sex abuse was filed by a man who says he was abused roughly 20 years ago by a priest.

“No one who has fairly watched the sex abuse scandal in the Catholic Church unfold would maintain that the Church has handled this problem well. But it must be said in equal firmness that the current environment is anything but fair to the Church. We hail today’s decision and look forward to the high court overturning the California law.”