

PA GRAND JURY REPORTS MAY BE ABOLISHED

The table has been set for grand jury reports in Pennsylvania to be abolished. That was the recommendation of the Investigating Grand Jury Task Force.

The panel was established in 2017, a year before Pennsylvania Attorney General Josh Shapiro issued his discredited grand jury report on Catholic priests in the state. While the task force recommendation can do nothing to change what Shapiro did, it vindicates the position of the Catholic League.

Last year, we filed an amicus brief supporting the right of 11 priests, all of whom argued that if their names were made public on a list of accused clergy, it would violate their reputational rights under the state constitution. We won. On December 3, 2018, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court ruled in a 6-1 decision that the grand jury report could not make public the names of the priests.

A grand jury report is not proof of anything. That is why it is common practice not to make public its findings. The accused do not have a chance to defend themselves and there is no cross examination of accusers or witnesses.

The Grand Jury Task Force recommended abolition of what it called a “deeply flawed” system. That system allows grand juries to issue reports that critically assess those who have not been criminally charged. Not only do prosecutors control the proceedings and evidence, the panel said, all they have to do is meet a “preponderance of evidence” standard; they noted that test “can be too effortlessly satisfied.”

Shapiro was hot under the collar when he learned of the report. He singled out the Catholic Church, made wild generalizations, and used his authority to smear the Church.

He is a disgrace.