

SEX ABUSE IN THE SCHOOLS: GO AFTER PUBLIC SCHOOLS ONLY

Rev. Anthony Evans, president of the National Black Church Initiative, supports a bill by New York State Assemblywoman Margaret Markey that addresses the sexual abuse of minors. In the April 22 edition of *Newsday*, he blamed the Catholic Church for opposing it. Evans said, "It is a shame we have to fight against the [Catholic] church in this. It breaks my heart."

The day before, State Senator Thomas Duane explained why he is in favor of the Markey bill. He said that "for one year after the passage of the bill, adults who were abused years or even decades ago as children could bring charges against the abusers...Not allowing victims to do that is a continued perpetration [sic] against them."

There are two bills before the New York State Assembly that address the sexual abuse of minors. The legislation sponsored by Assemblywoman Markey and one by Assemblyman Vito Lopez. The Markey bill leaves unamended the 90-day period wherein a minor who was abused in a public school must file suit; it opens the door for one year to those victimized in a Catholic school to file suit, even if the crime occurred decades ago. The Lopez bill treats both public and private institutions equally and does not discriminate between the two.

We said that it is a shame that Rev. Evans and Sen. Duane are interested in punishing Catholic schools while exempting public schools. So we decided to take a different approach. When speaking to the media, Bill Donohue said, "Since they [Evans and Duane] maintain that the Markey bill applies equally to public and Catholic schools, Duane should introduce a bill that would simply reverse the rules: give those who were abused in a Catholic school 90 days to file a claim, and put no time limit on those who were abused in a public school."

A reverse Markey bill would also make more sense: most of the abuse has taken place in the public schools.”

After weeks of pounding away at the Markey bill, *Newsday* finally seemed to catch our point. On April 26, in a Sunday editorial, the paper endorsed—with modification—the Lopez bill. It called Markey’s proposed legislation an “ill-advised bill” that would “set a dangerous precedent of allowing the emotions of the times to target a specific group or religion.”

Although this endorsement came as a surprise to us, we were grateful to the newspaper for its support. Bill Donohue wrote in a published letter to the editor: “The shame of it is that the Markey bill’s inherent bias is still not seen by every reasonable person as an outrage. Thanks to *Newsday*, the mask is coming off.”

It wasn’t only *Newsday* that came out in support of the Lopez bill, but it gained momentum in the Orthodox Jewish community as well. Even Gov. David Paterson came out in favor of it.

As this issue of *Catalyst* went to press, both the Markey and Lopez bills are still pending in the Assembly.