

# SEXUAL ABUSE BILL DIES IN PENNSYLVANIA

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on a sexual abuse bill that will not see the light of day:

The sexual abuse of minors has long been the subject of a proposal that would provide a suspension of the statute of limitations in Pennsylvania, allowing alleged victims to pursue their claims in court. To succeed, the House and Senate had to amend the state constitution, which they did in 2019; Gov. Tom Wolf signed the bill.

However, it was soon learned that the Wolf administration failed to initiate a public review process, thus stopping the proposal from being put on the ballot. To rectify this error, an emergency constitutional amendment was proposed, but it was killed on March 22 by state senate Republicans.

The real story here, at least for the Catholic League, is the unmasking of Rep. Mark Rozzi, the most vociferous lawmaker in favor of the bill.

The Catholic League has fought every proposed state law on this subject, wherever it has been introduced, that gives a free pass to public institutions. We know what the game is—"let's get the Catholic Church."

Unlike the public schools, which still have a serious problem with the sexual abuse of minors, the Church has long since cleaned up its act; current news stories are almost always about old cases of abuse. But that means nothing to people like Rozzi, a lawmaker beholden to the teachers' unions.

Senate Judiciary Committee Chairwoman Lisa Baker called Rozzi's bluff. She offered an amendment to the bill that would apply equally to public institutions, eliminating the shield

provided by the doctrine of sovereign immunity. Her amendment would also have eliminated the limit on the amount of money victims could sue for (claims against public sector employees are capped at \$500,000). In other words, the public schools would be treated the same way as the Catholic Church.

Predictably, Rozzi went ballistic. His only interest was payback: he claims he was abused by a priest when he was a minor. While we understand his anger, this hardly justifies his enthusiasm for a law that flagrantly discriminates against the Catholic Church.

If a lawmaker who was abused years earlier by a public school teacher were to introduce a bill that only targeted the public sector, giving Catholic schools a pass, we know what the teachers' unions would say.

In 2017, Rozzi said he heard from "grown men and women whose lives had been destroyed by ministers of every denomination, scout leaders, *public* and private school teachers, coaches, missionaries, and worst of all, family members (my *italic*)."

Yet he did nothing to help those abused in the public schools.

No institution, public or private, should ever be exempt from these laws. It is high time that every state repealed its strictures on sovereign immunity.

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