

# TIME TO PROBE ABUSE IN NJ SCHOOLS

*The duplicity of probing Catholic dioceses for the sexual abuse of minors, while allowing the public schools to run rampant, has recently been most evident in New Jersey. Here is our response.*

June 18, 2025

Hon. Matthew J. Platkin  
New Jersey Attorney General  
25 Market St.  
Trenton, NJ 08611

Dear Attorney General Platkin:

There is no crisis of the sexual abuse of minors in the Catholic Church today—anywhere in the nation—but there is one extant in New Jersey's public schools. It is time to commence a grand jury to investigate the extent of it.

To my first point, recently released data by investigators charged with accounting for the sexual abuse of minors conducted by the Catholic clergy found that between July 1, 2023 and June 30, 2024, there were exactly two substantiated cases made against 48,176 members; this comes to 0.004 percent. This is not the figure for New Jersey—it is the figure for the United States.

Your office has been laboring for seven years to empanel a grand jury to probe Catholic dioceses on this issue. On June 16, the New Jersey State Supreme Court ruled that this can be done, even though state law says that such proceedings can only be brought against public institutions. The Diocese of Camden, which we supported in an amicus brief, threw in the towel, leaving the door open to a grand jury probe.

If you are going to continue to go after the Catholic Church, where there is no crisis, you surely must go after the public schools, where one exists today. You won't have to worry about state law—grand juries can be authorized against the public schools. But for some reason, they never are. You can now correct this double standard.

Are you aware of what is going on in New Jersey's public schools?

- In April 2025, it was reported that six former Cherry Hill students accused the school district of failing to protect them from a teacher who sexually abused them four decades ago. Six lawsuits have been filed in Camden County Superior Court since 2023, half of them in April. The lawsuits also allege that Cherry Hill school district officials failed to make required reports of suspected abuse to the state's child welfare agency.
- In January 2025, a Middle Township Elementary School teacher in South Jersey, who gave birth to a child whose father was her student, was accused of sexually abusing the student in her home.
- In December 2024, matters got so bad in Paterson that officials from the federal Department of Education had to step in. For five years school officials allegedly failed to address sexual harassment, including sexual assault, despite numerous complaints.
- In April 2024, a Mercer County high school teacher was charged with sexually assaulting a student. This allegedly happened multiple times at Hamilton High School West.
- In February 2024, a substitute teacher who works in Camden County was charged with the sexual assault of a 14-year-old girl multiple times.

It gets worse. In November 2024, a panel of judges found that two school districts, South Orange-Maplewood and Upper Freehold Regional, cannot be found "vicariously liable" for the sexual abuse of children in their schools. The judges

ruled that school districts could not be sued for the teachers' conduct when they allegedly sexually assaulted students.

Catholics deserve an even playing field. It is outrageous that school districts cannot be sued when their teachers molest their students, but Catholic dioceses can. More outrageous is the non-stop investigation of Catholic institutions—when all the data show that this problem has long been resolved—while the public schools get a pass, even though that is where this problem continues today.

If you, or state lawmakers, want to start a probe of this problem in the public schools, be sure you go back to 1940 looking for offenses. That is what your office is doing to Catholic dioceses. If you do not, singling out Catholic institutions for a grand jury investigation smacks of religious profiling, which in this case amounts to anti-Catholicism.

Sincerely,

William A. Donohue, Ph.D.  
President

cc: New Jersey state lawmakers