

VICTORY IN NORTH DAKOTA; BILL TO BUST CONFESSIONAL PULLED

Once again state lawmakers attempted to bust the seal of the confessional, and once again they withdrew their bill under pressure from the Catholic League.

Two years ago it was California lawmakers who tried to violate our sacramental right. Last year it was Utah. This year it was North Dakota. All three bills were introduced citing the need to uncover information about the sexual abuse of minors allegedly learned in the confessional.

The bill's co-sponsor, Sen. Judy Lee, asked that the legislation be withdrawn. Inforum, a media outlet that covers the Fargo-Moorhead area, took note of the role of the Catholic League.

"In a Jan. 20 letter, William Donohue, president of the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights, said that legislation to break the seal of the confessional was a 'direct assault on our faith.'" Grand Forks Herald also cited our campaign, as did other North Dakota media outlets.

In the letter that the reporter referenced, Donohue raised three questions.

"Can you identify a single instance—just one will do—where it was later learned that a grave injustice was done to a victim of clergy sexual abuse owing to the failure of a priest to disclose what he learned in the confessional?"

"Can you identify anything learned by the recent 18-month investigation of the Catholic Church by the Attorney General of North Dakota that justifies such an egregious violation of the First Amendment rights of the Catholic clergy and the Catholic laity."

“Can you explain why you have given a pass to the lawyer-client privilege and the exemption afforded psychologists and their patients?

Do they not learn of sexual abuse behind closed doors?”

Here is how we won. We enlisted the support of our email base of supporters [see our website on how to join] and they contacted Sen. Lee asking her to pull her bill. We also contacted all North Dakota lawmakers.

There is no evidence that victims of sexual abuse are being ignored by lawmakers—anywhere in the nation—because of the Catholic sacrament of Reconciliation.

Therefore, bills that target the confessional are not only unconstitutional—a clear violation of the free exercise of religion encoded in the First Amendment—they do nothing to bring justice to minors who have been abused.

We are proud of this important victory. When the state seeks to sabotage our sacraments—on wholly contrived charges no less—the religious liberty implications cannot be more serious. As such, this is a win for all religions.

Thanks to those who contacted the North Dakota lawmakers. They got the message, loud and clear.