

WHAT JOSH SHAPIRO DID TO PRIESTS WAS DISGRACEFUL

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on Pennsylvania gubernatorial candidate Josh Shapiro:

On the website of Pennsylvania gubernatorial candidate Josh Shapiro it boasts that when he was Attorney General of the state he “exposed the Catholic Church’s decades-long cover up of child sexual abuse, identifying over 300 predator priests and thousands of victims and spurring investigation across the United States.”

This is a distorted account of Shapiro’s shameful grand jury investigation of Catholic priests. (For more on this subject see my book, [*The Truth about Clergy Sexual Abuse*](#).)

Shapiro convinced the media that he found evidence of 301 priests who abused more than 1,000 children over a period of seventy years. This is thrice false (1) not all the alleged offenders were priests (2) most of the alleged victims were adolescents, not children, and (3) the report was not evidentiary—it was investigative—meaning that the accused priests were never given the opportunity to rebut the charges.

Importantly, nothing could be done about most of those who were actually guilty. Almost all the accused were either dead or had been thrown out of the priesthood. No wonder Shapiro was able to prosecute only two priests. He knew this from the get-go, but he used the report to push for a suspension of the statute of limitations.

Shapiro misused the grand jury for political purposes, and now he is at it again.

Alan Dershowitz understands what a grand jury is supposed to do. “The grand jury has a specific function. It’s supposed to

only indict or not indict. Indeed, prosecutors generally don't issue reports for that reason because they only hear one side of the case. They don't hear the other side. There's no cross examination of witnesses. That's why it is regarded as wrong for prosecutors to issue reports."

It is precisely because grand jury reports are not factual that the Catholic League filed an amicus brief challenging the right of the Pennsylvania grand-jury report to make public the names of eleven priests who claimed that doing so would violate their reputational rights as guaranteed by the state constitution.

On December 3, 2018, our case, handled by Pittsburgh lawyers from Jones Day, won: the Pennsylvania Supreme Court ruled 6-1 in our favor. In November 2019, a Pennsylvania Supreme Court task force, which had been empanelled two years earlier, vindicated our effort: it recommended abolishing grand jury reports altogether.

Even those of a more liberal bent, such as former New York Times reporter Peter Steinfelds, took apart the grand jury report piece by piece. To declare, as the report said, that "all victims were brushed aside, in every part of the state, by church officials who preferred to protect the abusers and their institutions above all" was unconscionable. He called it "grossly misleading, irresponsible, inaccurate, and unjust."

Steinfelds also referred to the report "as a weapon in the debate over this issue," citing its "ugly, indiscriminate, and inflammatory" rhetoric and unsubstantiated charges, "to say nothing of the evidence the report ignores." He concluded that this was "truly unworthy of a judicial body" that is "responsible for impartial justice."

What is particularly galling about Shapiro is his total disinterest in prosecuting sexual molesters in the public schools. That's where this problem has been the most serious.

Yet he has never once shown any interest in holding teachers and administrators accountable for their delinquency. This kind of bias—one standard of justice for priests and another for educators—is despicable.

Shapiro's handling of the grand jury report on Catholic priests was disgraceful. That he is now using it as a campaign weapon makes him all the more contemptible.