

Greater Baltimore Voice of the Faithful, a group of faithful Catholics, is saddened by the opportunity lost for justice and protection of all Maryland children by the withdrawal of HB858 which would have increased statutes of limitation for civil cases against child sex offenders.

The withdrawal followed intensive bullying tactics and backroom political maneuvering from the state's Catholic leadership. As experienced during previous efforts to deny victims justice, the Maryland Catholic Conference and Archdiocese of Baltimore aggressively fought this bill. These efforts are indicative of their continued campaign to avoid responsibility for the actions of child predator priests. Their demands and orders to local parish leaders to speak out against the bill at every Sunday Mass and to urge parishioners to contact legislators is fearmongering at its worst.

Their talking points are inaccurate and misleading. Their fear tactics of bankruptcy are unfounded. Their claims of abuse victims seeking justice will cause the elimination of the good work of local churches is ridiculous. This fearmongering is absurd, is unsubstantiated and goes against the very teachings of our faith.

The tactics of Maryland Catholic Conference Director Dick Dowling, as well as the poor leadership on this issue from Archbishop Edwin O'Brien, remind VOTF members of the comments made by former Oklahoma Gov. (FBI agent, U.S. Attorney and Associate U.S. Attorney General) Frank Keating. In his 2003 resignation letter as head of the U.S. Catholic Conference of Bishops National Review Board examining sex abuse by priests, he compared church leaders to the Mafia. "To resist grand jury subpoenas, to suppress the names of offending clerics, to deny, to obfuscate, to explain away; that is the model of a criminal organization, not my church."

Bishop O'Brien continued to lose the trust of Catholics, and many believe he has taken liberties with the truth. While he and the leadership instruct priests to tell parishioners that the church's charitable work will be eliminated if this bill passes, he knows over 85 percent of funding for Catholic Charity Social Services comes from taxpayers via government grants, while only 1 percent comes from parishes. This is yet another example of why 23 million Catholics may have walked away from a church whose leadership has become untrustworthy.

Archbishop O'Brien, the Maryland Catholic Conference's Dowling and the archdiocese have yet again left Maryland children in harm's way and continue to protect child rapists and abusers.

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