

RULING ON PUBLICATION OF DOCUMENTS RELATED TO SEXUAL ABUSE BY PRIESTS OF THE DIOCESE OF BRIDGEPORT

1993. 23 cases charging sexual abuse by priests were filed against the Diocese.

1994 December. Bridgeport Superior Court Judge Bruce Levin temporarily sealed the court records until a jury trial could begin 1994. Diocese argued the need to protect (1) the reputation of Diocese and priests and (2) their right to a fair trial.

2001. Out-of-court settlement. Documents sealed.
Suit by The New York Times, The Hartford Courant, The Boston Globe, and The Washington Post to have documents unsealed.

2002 May. Waterbury Superior Court Judge Robert McWeeny ordered unsealing: “in a matter of such widespread public interest, the judicial system should not be party to a cover-up denying access to such information.” The diocese engaged “in endlessly delaying litigation, sealing files, and coercing victims into nondisclosure settlements.” Appeal by Diocese.

2003 June. Three-judge Appellate Court ruled that the newspapers had not appealed the order sealing the court records in a timely manner. Appeal by Diocese to State Supreme Court.

2005 November 5. State Supreme Court ruled that the records should be made public and remanded the case to the Superior Court for action.

2006 December 6. Jon Alander, Judge of the Superior Court, ordered unsealing. The original sealing order was temporary. The cases were settled out of court so there was no need to protect the defendants’ (Diocese and priests) right to a fair trial. Public’s right of access to court records outweighs employees’ interest in the confidentiality of their personnel files.

Diocesan Response. Disappointment. Concern for litigants “who settle their cases to preserve their privacy and hope to move forward with their lives.” Reopening the records will not “achieve the healing and resolution the community desires.”

SNAP’s Response. Names of pedophile priests and complicit bishops should be known. “Without this knowledge the deep and on-going wounds caused by the church’s cover up scandal will never truly heal and vulnerable children will never truly be safe.” Bridgeport officials should “stop their expensive, protracted legal maneuvers to hide the truth.”

December 27, Diocesan Appeal to State Supreme Court. Charged that Judge Alander should have recused himself because he was sitting on a committee concerning public access to court documents.

2009 May 22. Decision of State Supreme Court, 4-1 in favor of unsealing the records.

Diocesan Response. Court failed to acknowledge steps taken by Diocese to protect

children from predators. Court also failed to acknowledge that Judge Alander could not act impartially. Diocese is considering its options.

SNAP's Response. "Continued secrecy, legal hairsplitting and delays...contradict the Pope's wishes." Children will be safer and Catholics reassured "if you stop exploiting every legal technicality and maneuver your lawyers can dream up, and start acting more like a compassionate shepherd instead of a cold-hearted CEO, and let the truth emerge."

2009 July 6. Refusal of the State Supreme Court to order an en banc hearing (involving all seven justices) of its decision to open the records.

2009 July 17. Diocesan Request to State Supreme Court to stay release of records pending a Diocesan Appeal to the United States Supreme Court. Diocese claims that it is a violation of the religion clauses of the First Amendment for a court to second-guess a Church's selection and evaluation of its ministers.

2009 July 31. State Supreme Court continued its stay on publication of records pending Diocesan Appeal to US Supreme Court. Diocese will ask US Supreme Court to stay publication until after it determines whether to review the case.

SNAP's Response: "It's one more reminder that bishops will do everything possible to protect themselves and their colleagues instead of children."

Stamford Advocate: "it's time to come clean, once and for all."

New Haven Register: "The diocese is still seeking to hide its past."

2009 August 7. Diocese asks the U.S. Supreme Court to stay publication of the court documents until the Diocese files its appeal.

2009 August 25. Denial by Justice Ruth Bader Ginsberg of the US Supreme Court of the Diocese's motion to stay publication of the court documents until the Diocese submits its petition for certiorari, that is, its appeal. Diocese is considering whether to ask all nine justices to rule on the stay.