

Dept. of Justice: AG Kaul issues update on statewide inquiry into clergy and faith leader abuse

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MADISON, Wis. – Attorney General Josh Kaul is providing an update today on the ongoing statewide inquiry into clergy and faith leader abuse, led by the Wisconsin Department of Justice (DOJ), with support from district attorneys, survivor groups, and crime victim services professionals. The inquiry is ongoing and will take time to complete, so anyone with information still has time to report.

Survivors of clergy or faith leader abuse, their friends and family, or anyone who has information about how a religious organization has responded to reported abuse are encouraged to report that information to DOJ either online at SupportSurvivors.widoj.gov or by calling 1-877-222-2620.

“Thank you to the courageous people who have come forward to provide information about clergy and faith leader abuse,” said AG Kaul. “This review seeks to help bring healing to survivors and to help stop future harm, and we continue to encourage survivors and others with information to report.”

Since opening the inquiry, DOJ has received nearly 180 reports of abuse by clergy and faith leaders or related to how a religious organization has responded to abuse. The reports have concerned clergy and faith leaders of multiple religious organizations as well as some reports of abuse not related to any religious organization. Some reports include claims against multiple abusers.

Of the reports received thus far, about 80 percent are reports of abuse, and the remaining 20 percent are reports involving how a religious institution responded to reports of abuse. The ages of those reporting range from under 18 to over 75. Additionally, of the reports received, nearly 40 came from individuals who had previously not reported to a law enforcement agency or a religious authority. The reports received involve alleged abusers from every Catholic diocese in Wisconsin, from other denominations, as well as some reports of abuse not relating to any religious organization.

DOJ continues to receive reports online and by phone. The phone calls can provide a meaningful opportunity for survivors to share their report with a trained victim services professional. Many survivors have chosen to speak at length about their experience with a DOJ victim services professional, with some calls lasting more than two hours. In other cases, survivors chose to provide an abbreviated report or submit information through the DOJ online reporting tool. Ultimately, individuals contacting DOJ can choose how much information they want to share. Regardless of the information provided, each report is carefully reviewed by a multidisciplinary team comprised of law enforcement, victim services, and a prosecutor, which may take several months to complete.

DOJ continues to gather information directly from survivors and their family, friends, and advocates through the contact number (**1-877-222-2620**) and the online submission form (available at SupportSurvivors.widoj.gov). As part of the review, victim advocates and/or sensitive crimes investigators may follow up with survivors to conduct trauma-informed interviews. To the extent that further investigation is necessary to support potential prosecutions, with the victim’s consent, DOJ will refer those cases to local law enforcement and district attorneys as appropriate. In some cases, after consulting with local law enforcement and with the victim’s consent, DOJ may conduct additional investigation.

Through this initiative, DOJ provides survivors of clergy and faith leader abuse with a safe and confidential means to obtain support from DOJ’s Office of Crime Victim Services and referrals to available services.

The initiative also provides a confidential means for:

- survivors to report sexual abuse by clergy and faith leaders;
- others who have witnessed, know about, or suspect such abuse to report it; and
- people to report what they know about the response to or concealment of abuse by clergy and faith leaders.

For more information about the inquiry, including responses to frequently asked questions, please visit SupportSurvivors.widoj.gov.