

Kaul announces DOJ effort to gather info on cases of clergy abuse

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Dem AG Josh Kaul announced a review of clergy sexual abuse that will focus initially on five Catholic dioceses around the state.

During a Capitol news conference, Kaul urged anyone with information about sexual abuse at other places of religious worship to come forward. He said those people can report any abuse they know of using a new hotline that keeps abuse reporters' names from getting out to those who they report against.

Kaul added DOJ will work with local district attorneys and survivor advocacy groups to conduct the review. They will review and request any documents related to sexual abuse in places of religious worship.

Kaul requested any survivors, people who know survivors, members of religious groups or religious workers such as priests and nuns to report any instances of sexual abuse they know of, whether it happened long ago or recently.

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He also said anyone with information or evidence of any form of sexual abuse should report it to DOJ.

And while Kaul said many of the sexual abuse instances they will look at will likely not be prosecutable because they fall outside the statute of limitations, he said the effort is important because it increases accountability for religious leaders and groups.

He added any evidence of sexual abuse that could be prosecuted will likely be turned over to local law enforcement for further investigation. But he said larger scale investigations into how institutions handle sexual abuse will be handled by

DOJ.

See the release [here](#).

Catholic dioceses singled out in Kaul's inquiry responded with some concerns the effort could bring more public scrutiny to survivors.

The Archdiocese of Milwaukee in a [statement](#) said the sexual abuse inquiry could "re-victimize" abuse survivors by placing them in the spotlight again. The Roman Catholic group, which serves over half a million registered Catholics in southeastern Wisconsin, said it doesn't understand the legal basis for the inquiry and questioned why only Catholic churches were singled out in Kaul's press release.

The diocese added the Catholic Church has become a model for how sexual abuse cases are handled, adding sexual abuse is a societal issue, not a Catholic Church issue.

Kaul previously sent letters to all five Catholic dioceses in Wisconsin announcing DOJ's intent to investigate the issue. Those include dioceses in Superior, La Crosse, Milwaukee, Madison and Green Bay.

The [Diocese of Green Bay](#) and [Diocese of Madison](#) in separate statements said they will review any DOJ information requests. They added they take sexual abuse seriously and aim to help victims move on.

But the Diocese of Green Bay said it had not yet received any such requests from DOJ.

Sexual abuse survivors praised the announcement, saying the Catholic Church has covered up sexual abuse within the clergy for too long.

Peter Isely, program director for the victims' advocacy group Nate's Mission, said the inquiry will lift the veil covering sexual abuse in churches. He said church leaders have been putting on a "ring of invisibility" to protect themselves from scrutiny.

"What this initiative we hope is going to do, is to remove that ring and to bring into visibility the suffering, and sorrow and tragedy of so many victims in our families," Isely said.

Isely added victims and survivors can help bring perpetrators to justice and prevent further harm by reaching out to DOJ with any information they have. He said those survivors have evidence prosecutors need.

Also at the press conference, the leader of a group of Catholics fighting sexual abuse in churches praised the effort.

Sara Larson, head of Awake, said her group of Catholic worshippers welcomes the investigation, which she said will make the church better.

"I understand the temptation to wish that this would all just go away, so that we don't have to think about these horrible stories any longer," she said. "But the reality is that abuse in our church is not a problem of the past."v