

Nate's Mission: As Attorney General Kaul urges victims and whistleblowers to come forward, federal lawsuit filed alleging racial discrimination by Wisconsin-based religious order

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This morning attorneys filed a [federal civil complaint](#) yesterday against the Franciscans of the Blessed Virgin Mary, headquartered in Franklin, Wisconsin, and the Diocese of Jackson in the case of former Franciscan Brother Paul West, alleging discrimination and racial disparities in the treatment of Raphael Love, a Black clergy abuse victim. The lawsuit is believed to be the first of its kind in the clergy abuse crisis alleging a pattern of racial discrimination both in the placement of known offenders and treatment of survivors.

West is [currently facing criminal charges](#) in Outagamie County in Wisconsin and Leflore County in Mississippi. Today's filing in the Eastern District of Wisconsin follows a [federal civil suit against West in the Southern District of New York](#).

Last month, clergy abuse survivors and representatives of Nate's Mission, alongside Love's attorney Phillip Aaron, [held a press conference](#) in front of the Milwaukee Federal Courthouse to discuss the case as well as practices of racial discrimination within the Milwaukee archdiocese. Evidence found within 6,000 pages of court-ordered released documents [confirm a pattern](#) in which [known child sex offenders have been transferred into predominantly Black and low-income parishes](#) at higher rates than white parishes.

In a [brief statement that was provided by the Milwaukee archdiocese](#), spokesperson Jerry Topczewski neglected to address the evidence of racial disparities in the treatment of Black clergy abuse victims raped and sexually assaulted by priests, teachers, and other employees within the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, [all of whom are considered Catholic ministers under state law](#). Topczewski falsely claims that Archbishop Listecki has no control over religious order clerics, who comprise over half the clergy working in the archdiocese.

According to Father Jim Connell, former Vice Chancellor of the Milwaukee archdiocese and canon lawyer, Archbishop Listecki does share responsibility for any crimes West may have committed as well as the institutional concealment of those crimes by the Franciscan order ([Can. 678 §1](#)). At a minimum, Listecki should be calling publicly for the Franciscans to tell the whole truth and release all documentation related to the case.

Today's filing, however, does not include the Archdiocese of Milwaukee as a defendant due to an injunction ([Case No. 11-20059-svk, p. 38](#)) church lawyers insisted be included in their 2015 bankruptcy, discharging claims against the archdiocese related to sexual abuse of minors that had taken place prior to the filing of the Chapter 11 Petition in January 2011.

This injunction bars any victim from filing a case in court, even if they were not a creditor in the bankruptcy or have been actively discouraged, intimidated, or threatened against taking court action.

Thankfully, the archdiocese and their religious orders are governed by the criminal and civil laws of the state of Wisconsin. This is why Attorney General Josh Kaul has opened a statewide investigation into clergy abuse and cover-up within Wisconsin's faith-based organizations.

Survivors, their friends and family, or anyone who has information about the church's response to abuse are encouraged to report clergy and faith leader abuse online at SupportSurvivors.wisconsin.gov or by calling [1-877-222-2620](tel:1-877-222-2620).