

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

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December 1 , 2022

SENT VIA EMAIL AND U.S. MAIL

Josh.Kaul@doj.state.wi.us.

The Honorable Josh Kaul
Attorney General of the State of Wisconsin
Wisconsin Department of Justice
P.O. Box 7857
Madison, WI 53707-7857

Re: Investigation into clergy abuse

Dear Mr. Attorney General:

We are writing on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) to urge you to escalate your investigation of Wisconsin clergy members who have been accused of sexual abuse. FFRF is a Madison-based national nonprofit organization with more than 39,000 members across the country, including more than 1,600 members in Wisconsin. FFRF protects the constitutional separation between state and church and educates about nontheism.

In April 2021, you announced that the state Department of Justice (DOJ) would launch an investigation into abuse by clergy members and other faith-based community leaders in Wisconsin. At the time, the DOJ was tasked with reviewing documents and religious orders, taking direct reports from victims and their families, and working with district attorneys to coordinate investigations as necessary. Nearly a year later the investigation was reportedly downgraded to a “review,” stripping officials of critical legal resources necessary to conduct a thorough investigation.¹

Clergy abuse has long infiltrated religious institutions in Wisconsin, much like the rest of the country. More than 200 reports of clergy abuse had been filed in the year with the DOJ

¹ “Nates Mission: AG Kaul Downgrades Clergy Abuse ‘Investigation’ to Review,” WisPolitics, August 10, 2022, <https://www.wispolitics.com/2022/nates-mission-ag-kaul-downgrades-clergy-abuse-investigation-to-review>.

since the investigation had been launched.² More recently, a Wisconsin Public Radio article highlighted a list of clergy members who have been credibly accused of sexual abuse, provided by the Catholic Diocese of Superior.³ Given these revelations self-reported by the Superior Diocese, we believe that re-opening an independent investigation would potentially unearth more clergy abuse that has harmed so many, and is in order.

An independent and — perhaps more importantly — a secular investigation is critical to the integrity of the findings. In Illinois, advocates for clergy abuse victims named twice as many offenders than did the Catholic Church.⁴ Attorneys for the victims believe that the discrepancy is because the church is choosing to withhold information that it does not deem credible. Similarly, recent court filings revealed that there have been more than 600 victims under the Baltimore Archdiocese, and “almost certainly hundreds more,” according to Attorney General Brian Frosh.⁵ We urge you to not give the Catholic Church the opportunity to cover up for its own clergy.

Survivors deserve an investigation that holds perpetrators — and those who provide them a safe haven — accountable. Ensuring that every potential legal recourse remains on the table is vital to offering healing to survivors and their families, as well as sending a message that such abuse will not be tolerated in the state of Wisconsin.

Thank you for taking proactive measures to look into the accusations of clergy abuse across the state of Wisconsin. We ask that you continue to use every resource at your disposal to investigate these claims of abuse in the state of Wisconsin, bring justice to survivors and their families and name and prosecute those who perpetrated and facilitated this abuse.

Very truly,

Handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Annie Laurie Gaylor Dan Barker".

Annie Laurie Gaylor & Dan Barker
Co-Presidents

² The Associated Press, “Kaul’s Clergy Abuse Generates 200 Reports in 1 Year,” NBC 15, accessed November 30, 2022,

<https://www.nbc15.com/2022/04/19/kauls-clergy-abuse-generates-200-reports-1-year/>.

³ Danielle Kaeding, “Superior Diocese Releases Names of Clergy with Credible Claims of Child Sex Abuse,” Wisconsin Public Radio, November 29, 2022,

<https://www.wpr.org/superior-diocese-releases-names-clergy-credible-claims-child-sex-abuse>.

⁴ Don Babwin, “Attorneys: Church List of Accused Illinois Clergy Incomplete,” Illinois Public Media, March 21, 2019,

<https://will.illinois.edu/news/story/attorneys-church-list-of-accused-illinois-clergy-incomplete>.

⁵ Michelle Boorstein and Erin Cox, “Probe of Baltimore Archdiocese finds over 600 clergy sexual abuse victims,” Washington Post, accessed December 1, 2022,

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/religion/2022/11/17/maryland-catholic-sexual-abuse-report/>.