



Attorney General Doug Peterson

News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Attorney General Releases Report on Clergy Sexual Abuse

Today, Attorney General Doug Peterson issued a *Report on Clergy Sexual Abuse* which is a final report from an investigation that began in August of 2018. It was at that time the Nebraska Department of Justice sent letters to the bishops of the three Nebraska Dioceses requesting all investigative files in their possession relating to child sexual abuse dating back to January 1, 1978.

Nebraska Dioceses were asked for files relating to any claims of improper sexual conduct or sexual exploitation perpetrated by any person given authority by the dioceses to carry out church functions. Incidents of child pornography or sexual communication with a minor were also included in the scope of our request. All three dioceses submitted material responsive to the letters.

The dioceses were also asked for the policies and procedures utilized by each for both reporting and investigating sexual misconduct allegations. An examination of this material revealed these policies and procedures were not uniform. Each diocese had developed its own system for evaluating reports of sexual abuse or misconduct. A section of the Report addresses each of the dioceses' current practices for preventing and responding to such claims.

During the investigation, the Nebraska DOJ determined additional information was needed to ensure the completeness of the Report.

On February 19, 2019, with the assistance of the Nebraska State Patrol and local law enforcement agencies, the Nebraska DOJ issued 426 subpoenas to individual Catholic churches and Catholic schools across Nebraska. The subpoenas requested the churches and schools produce records or documentation related to reports or allegations of sexual abuse committed by any church or school employee. The subpoenas produced a broader set of records related to schools and school staff members.

A review of the files showed, in some cases, victims of sexual abuse had entered into financial settlement agreements with the dioceses. Subpoenas were therefore issued to the liability insurance company which represented the dioceses to collect information about the nature of these settlements.

Finally, the investigators asked to review all psychological evaluations of priests who were being investigated for claims of sexual misconduct. Those records were voluntarily released by the Grand Island and Lincoln Dioceses. In order to obtain a review of the psychological evaluations from the Omaha Archdiocese, it was necessary to enter into a protective order signed by the district court.

To summarize, the Nebraska DOJ collected the information in the *Report on Clergy Sexual Abuse* from the following sources: the church files kept by all three Nebraska dioceses; information and interviews conducted by law enforcement pursuant to calls to the Hotline and Tip Line; subpoenaed records from individual Catholic churches and schools; subpoenaed records from the Catholic churches' liability insurance company; law enforcement reports; and media reports of sexual abuse cases.

Investigation involved:

- A complete examination of the files of over 200 clergy members and diocesan employees, as well as the supplemental material requested in subpoena requests.
- An investigation of over 120 calls to the Hotline and Tip Line. The calls came from citizens who reported various types of sexual improprieties committed by clergy members or diocesan employees. Many of the calls came from victims of sexual abuse. Some calls were from parents or siblings who were told about incidents of sexual abuse from the victim. Most of the incidents had never been reported to law enforcement.
- A review of reports from newspapers and other media outlets chronicling sexual abuse by clergy members or diocesan employees.
- A review of 12 hours of recorded interviews with those reporting sexual abuse.
- Examination of nearly 30,000 pages of relevant material.

The investigation resulted in credible allegations of sexual abuse and misconduct from 258 documented victims across the three dioceses in Nebraska. The Lincoln Diocese had 97 victims, the Omaha Diocese had 158 victims, and the Grand Island Diocese had 3 victims. The abuse was perpetrated by 57 church officials composed primarily of priests, deacons, and Catholic school teachers. The most troubling finding from the report is the fact that on numerous occasions when there was an opportunity to bring justice to the victims, those in authority chose to place the reputation of the church above the protection of the children who placed their spiritual care in the hands of those in church authority.

Report on Clergy Sexual Abuse is available on the Attorney General's website: ago.nebraska.gov.

If you believe abuse of a child has occurred or a child is at risk, you are required by law to report such information to the law enforcement or child protective services hotline. State law requires any person who suspects a child has been physically or sexually abused or neglected to report it promptly.

Nebraska Child Abuse Hotline: 1-800-652-1999

The Attorney General's Office is committed to investigating allegations of abuse, advocating for victims, and pursuing criminal prosecutions of child exploitation crimes involving physical or sexual abuse. In carrying out those duties, the Attorney General's Office works closely with numerous partners including, County Attorneys, law enforcement, and Child Advocacy Centers.

If victims or their families have questions about the Report they may call the Attorney General's Office at 531-739-8166, where they are able to leave name and number and calls will be returned.

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