

To Protect and Heal

Child Protection & the Catholic Church in Maryland

Zero tolerance for abuse. Compassionate care for survivors.



69,000+

clergy, teachers, employees, volunteers and seminarians background checked and trained



Survivor Care

payment for **counseling**, plus **financial support, pastoral and spiritual care**, and more



96,000+

children and youth receive safe environment education annually

Our commitment. Our policy. Our practice.

Prevention

- Background checks, training and mandated reporting for clergy, teachers, employees, volunteers and seminarians
- Background checks, psychological evaluations and multi-year formation for applicants to priesthood
- Safe environment education for children and adults

Outreach and Support for Survivors

- Support, such as payment for counseling for survivors and family members; an apology, and outreach that includes pastoral care, retreats and other resources
- Financial support for survivors

Accountability

- Written policies covering bishops, clergy, lay people
- Zero tolerance for abuse
- Immediate reporting to and cooperation with civil authorities
- Permanent removal from ministry of credibly accused – even if there is no criminal prosecution
- Names published of credibly accused clergy
- Independent Review Boards of child protection experts
- Annual independent compliance audits plus parish/school compliance audits

Data is for the three Catholic (arch)dioceses that serve Maryland: Archdiocese of Baltimore, Archdiocese of Washington, and Diocese of Wilmington. Figures are diocesan-wide, 2004-2018

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CHILD PROTECTION & SURVIVOR ASSISTANCE IN MARYLAND

WHAT IS THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN MARYLAND DOING TO PREVENT CHILD ABUSE?

As early as the 1980s, (arch)dioceses serving Maryland Catholics have had policies dedicated to protecting minors and supporting healing. Dioceses have child protection experts to advise on policies and practices. Since 2004, the dioceses have been audited annually and found in full compliance with national standards.

WHAT DO THESE POLICIES REQUIRE?

Safe environment policies provide rigorous screening, prevention and accountability: background checks for clergy, teachers, seminarians, employees and volunteers; prevention education for minors and adults; mandatory reporting to civil authorities and cooperation with investigations; care for victim-survivors; Review Boards of child protection experts; and zero tolerance for abuse (permanent removal from ministry or employment for those credibly accused) regardless of whether a person is charged criminally.

Applicants to the priesthood and permanent diaconate face additional screening, including psychological assessments, background checks and regular reviews during formation.

ARE THESE EFFORTS MAKING A DIFFERENCE?

Yes. Very few abuse incidents have been reported occurring since the adoption of stronger screening, training and stringent national standards. Researchers report allegations peaked nationally in the 1960s and 1970s (*Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate*).

HOW DOES THE CHURCH HELP SURVIVORS?

We offer support regardless of when a person comes forward. Each person's experience is different, so dioceses seek to tailor outreach, accompaniment and services to the person's situation. Examples include paid counseling of the person's choice, pastoral care, survivor retreats, other spiritual support, and an apology.

ARE CHURCH LEADERS HELD ACCOUNTABLE?

Yes. Everyone, including bishops, is subject to civil law and held accountable under Church law in the event of an allegation.

ARE ABUSERS HELD ACCOUNTABLE?

Yes. Maryland is one of few states with no criminal statute of limitations for child sexual abuse. An abuser may always be held accountable by the civil authorities for his (or her) actions.

The Catholic Church imposes additional penalties, including removal from ministry and other sanctions and the (arch)dioceses also have released names of clerics with credible allegations against them.

WHAT ARE CIVIL STATUTES OF LIMITATION?

Civil statutes of limitation allow a person to file a lawsuit for money against an individual and/or organization (such as a school, parish, or diocese) within a legally set time period. In Maryland, the statute for an allegation of child sexual abuse was extended in 2017 to age 38, a change that the Catholic dioceses supported.

Statutes exist to provide fairness because information is lost over the years and decades. The accused and witnesses may have passed away or become infirm. Statutes are particularly important with civil lawsuits because the burden of proof to pursue monetary damages is far lower than that for criminal prosecution.

WHAT IS "WINDOW" LEGISLATION?

A "window" removes the civil statute of limitations for a period of time, usually a year, to allow lawsuits for money to be filed regardless of the passage of time. The Maryland Attorney General's office has said a "window" for abuse would be unconstitutional.

Lawsuits typically are filed not against an individual, but against an organization, such as a parish, school, hospital or diocese. These suits are difficult to respond to fairly because the allegations may date back 50 to 70 years. The person accused often is deceased and witnesses and information are no longer available.

WOULD PUBLIC SCHOOLS BE TREATED THE SAME AS CATHOLIC SCHOOLS UNDER A WINDOW?

No. A Catholic school or parish could be sued for any amount of money, but a government agency facing the same allegation would be exempt from lawsuits or liability would be capped. For example, a victim of abuse at a public school would be precluded from suing or limited to \$100,000, depending on when the allegation occurred.

WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

Maryland (arch)dioceses are committed to supporting survivors regardless of the law. Window legislation would not prevent future abuse nor hold accountable the people responsible. It would result in disparate treatment for victims of non-public entities and have a lasting impact on the ability of parishes, schools and ministries to serve parishioners and low-income and marginalized Marylanders who depend on our ministries.

At least 20 dioceses have declared bankruptcy in the United States. A "window" bill in Delaware led to bankruptcy: a 40% loss in financial support for Catholic Charities, the closure of two schools and a fund to assist struggling parishes and schools, a 10% loss in diocesan staff and other cuts borne by parishioners and people in need of services.

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