



Attorney General Shapiro, State Rep. Stephens, Local DAs, Support Reform to Strengthen Mandatory Reporting of Sexual Abuse

One of Four Legislative Reforms Recommended by Statewide Grand Jury that Investigated Child Sex Abuse in Church in PA

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE — September 18, 2018

CONTACT: Joe Grace: 717-574-9095, jgrace@attorneygeneral.gov

NORRISTOWN – Attorney General Josh Shapiro today hosted a roundtable and press conference with state legislators, district attorneys, survivors of child sexual abuse and others to highlight the need for the legislature to approve four key reforms recommended by a statewide grand jury that investigated sexual abuse of minors by Catholic Church clergy and decades of institutional cover up by church leaders.

Attorney General Shapiro was joined at the Attorney General’s Trooper office by State Rep. Todd Stephens (R-151), Sen. John Rafferty (R-44), Montgomery County D.A. Kevin Steele, Bucks County D.A. Matthew Weintraub, PA Victim Advocate Jennifer Storm, and victims and their families of child sexual abuse by Catholic clergy.

Rep. Stephens announced at the news conference with Attorney General Shapiro that he is sponsoring legislation to strengthen the state law governing the mandatory reporting of child sexual abuse – a key reform recommended by the 40th Statewide Investigating Grand Jury. The grand jury released a report last month identifying 301 predator priests and more than 1,000 victims of clergy sexual abuse within six Dioceses in Pennsylvania – and a cover up by church officials that spanned decades.

“When the Grand Jury released its Report, I challenged all Pennsylvania Bishops to adopt and support each of these recommended reforms to Pennsylvania law,” said Attorney General Shapiro. “Sadly, none of them have. I’m proud to stand here today with Representative Stephens, district attorneys and survivors of child sexual abuse to take the first step towards adopting one of these essential reforms.”

“We know the vulnerability of young victims of sexual abuse, and they need every protection the law allows,” Rep. Stephens said. “We need to make sure our mandatory reporting law in place has the necessary teeth to protect victims and ensure law enforcement is notified of abuse allegations and can investigate whenever it is appropriate.”

Attorney General Shapiro and Rep. Stephens were joined at the news conference by two local prosecutors – Montgomery County D.A. Steele and Bucks County D.A. Weintraub – who lent their support for the mandatory reporting reform.

“Victims of child abuse suffer long-term consequences of their abuse,” said District Attorneys Steele and Weintraub in a statement. “This important legislation introduced by Rep. Stevens has the capability of sparing other children the devastating effects of abuse by making the penalties for failing to report abuse by mandated reporters reflect the seriousness of the offense.”

When the Grand Jury released its 884-page Report detailing decades of sexual abuse of children by priests and the resulting institutional cover up, it made four specific recommendations for reforms to prevent these abuses in the future. The recommendations are:

1. **Eliminate the criminal statute of limitations for sexually abusing children.** Current law permits victims to come forward until age 50. The grand jury recommends eliminating the criminal statute of limitation entirely.
2. **Create a “civil window” so older victims may sue for damages.** Current law gives child sex abuse victims 12 years to sue, once they turn 18. Many victims are not able to acknowledge their abuse or take action until long after the statute of limitations expired. The Grand Jury recommended “giving victims their two years back” – a two-year window to sue to recover for the harms perpetrated upon them by their abusers.
3. **Clarify penalties for a continuing failure to report child abuse.** The Grand Jury recommends changing state law to clarify the duty to report abuse. The new language imposes a continuing obligation to report “*while the person knows or has reasonable cause to believe the abuser is likely to commit additional acts of child abuse.*” This is the reform being supported by Rep. Stephens in the Pennsylvania House.
4. **Specify that Civil Confidentiality Agreements do not cover communications with law enforcement.** The Grand Jury found that the Church has used confidentiality agreements as a way to silence abuse victims from speaking publicly or cooperating with law enforcement. The Grand Jury proposed a new statute which states that no past or future agreement can prohibit an individual from communicating with law enforcement.

Attorney General Shapiro said his office pursues child sexual abuse – and institutional cover up – wherever it finds it. Since taking office in January 2017, Shapiro’s office has brought child sexual abuse charges against a western Pennsylvania police chief, a deputy coroner, a pediatrician and many others. Last year, his office secured convictions against the President of Penn State, Graham Spanier, and two university officials for endangering the welfare of minors in covering up child sexual abuse by former Penn State coach Jerry Sandusky.

“Pennsylvanians and people across the world have made a clear statement: The time for institutions to protect their reputation over protecting victims is over,” Attorney General Shapiro said.

To report child sexual abuse, call the hotline: 1-888-538-8541. To read the full grand jury report: <https://www.attorneygeneral.gov/report>

###