

Archdiocese of Philadelphia
Office of the Archbishop
222 North 17th Street
Philadelphia, PA 19103-1299

TO ALL PASTORS OF THE ARCHDIOCESE

Kindly ensure that this letter is read at all Masses the weekend of November 19-20.

Dear friends,

Earlier this year I alerted you to proposed state legislation that would endanger many of the parishes, schools and charities of Pennsylvania's 3.2 million Catholics. The bill, known as House Bill 1947, contained several provisions to protect children from sexual abuse. Unfortunately, it also contained damaging language that would have allowed retroactive civil lawsuits to be filed against religious and private institutions, while protecting public entities from the same kind of lawsuits for exactly the same kinds of sexual abuse.

In June, the state Senate voted 49-0 in favor of an amended version of House Bill 1947. The revised Senate legislation stripped out the unfair provision on retroactivity, largely because of its incompatibility with our state constitution. The revised Senate bill did, however, keep other provisions in the bill that would have served the needs of abuse survivors.

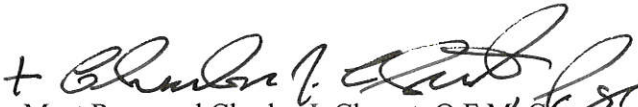
To move forward, the changes made in the Senate required the bill to be reconsidered in the House. It now seems that the bill will not be considered during the remaining days of the current legislative session. This means that none of its more acceptable measures will be passed into law.

Retroactive removal of the civil statute of limitation is unconstitutional under our Commonwealth's constitution. More importantly, as our pastors, along with many of our lay leaders, families and I stressed this spring, it is unjust. By unreasonably insisting on keeping retroactive provisions in the bill, a small number of individuals failed whole segments of the population who stood to benefit from the bill's other measures.

The Archdiocese is fully committed to protecting our young people from sexual abuse and assisting victims of past abuse with their healing. This will not change. At the same time, we will continue to update you about legislation that threatens the health of our parishes and Catholic ministries. Many of you made your concerns about HB 1947 very clear to our lawmakers this year, and it made a difference. I'm very grateful. When contact with our legislators is done respectfully, in a spirit of good will, the public life of our Commonwealth is well served.

In January a new legislative session will begin. Bills like HB 1947 are likely to resurface. I promise to keep you informed as we deal with these issues.

Gratefully yours in Jesus Christ,


Most Reverend Charles J. Chaput, O.F.M. Cap.
Archbishop of Philadelphia