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Greensburg, PA. — August 6, 2018
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The Greensburg Diocese said July 31 that in 2016 when it received an allegation of abuse against Fr. John Sweeney, a priest of the diocese, his priestly faculties were immediately revoked, and he was placed on administrative leave.

The priest, who retired Dec. 31, 2016, pleaded guilty July 31 to sexually molesting a fourth-grade boy in the 1990s. He was charged with the crime a year ago.

The diocese said in a statement it had fully cooperated with law enforcement's investigation of Sweeney. He was prohibited from presenting himself as a priest in public, and he was required to avoid any unsupervised contact with minors. "All the restrictions remain in place currently," the diocese said.

At the time the allegation was received, the diocese said, "Fr. Sweeney's file contained no prior allegations of sexual misconduct of any kind."

"The people of the Diocese of Greensburg pray for all of the survivors of child sexual abuse and want the survivors to know that we always stand ready to help them in their healing," the diocese said. "The people of the Diocese of Greensburg also pray for the person who courageously came forward and did the right thing by reporting this abuse, and for all those who have been hurt by sexual abuse in the past."

It said it takes the protection of all children, young people and vulnerable adults seriously. "Every report of suspected abuse of a child, young person or vulnerable adult -- sexual, physical or emotional -- that is made to the diocese is immediately reported to the PA ChildLine and the appropriate district attorney," it added.

The statement emphasized that " if anyone suspects that a child, young person or vulnerable adult has been abused by any one at any time, the person should call the PA ChildLine at 1-800-932-0313, no matter when the suspected incident might have occurred."

Diocesan efforts continue in educating "both children and adults in parishes and schools of the Diocese of Greensburg on how to spot and report suspected abuse," it said.

The Diocese of Greensburg is one of six dioceses that have been the subject of a months-long investigation by the state's attorney general into sexual abuse claims, many of which go back decades. The other dioceses are Harrisburg, Pittsburgh, Allentown, Scranton and Erie.

A redacted version of the report on that investigation is to be made available to the public as early as Aug. 8 and no later than Aug. 14.

The Pennsylvania Supreme Court ruled July 27 the redacted report should be released. In June, the court had put a hold on the full report being released because it said it needed to review challenges filed by "many individuals" named in the report.

"A number of the petitioners asserted that they were not aware of, or allowed to appear at, the proceedings before the grand jury," the court said in its earlier opinion.

In its new ruling, the court said the report will be edited to protect the identities of those challenging its release.

In Harrisburg, Bishop Ronald Gainer Aug. 1 released information from the diocese's own internal investigation on child sex abuse, including a list of the names of 71 clergy, both dead and alive, accused of abuse.

He also ordered removal from buildings, halls and rooms the names of former diocesan bishops going back to 1947.

The diocese had intended on releasing its list of accused abusers nearly two years ago, but the state attorney general's office had asked the diocese to not do so to protect its own investigation.

In Pittsburgh, Bishop David Zubik issued a statement the same day in response to Harrisburg's release of names of accused clergy.

"We respect the rights of all those involved in the grand jury process and support the Supreme Court's decision to expediently release the report so the stories and voices of victims can be heard," he said. "The Supreme Court's procedure is meant to ensure persons listed in the report are accorded their rights under the Pennsylvania Constitution."

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"While a seal remains in place, the forthcoming release of the grand jury's report will allow the opportunity for us to respond more fully in this matter," Zubik added.

On Aug. 3. Bishop Kevin Rhoades of Fort Wayne-South Bend, Indiana, who was bishop of Harrisburg from 2004-2009, issued a statement to Catholic News Service in reaction to developments in his former diocese and the anticipated release of the grand jury report.

"As we wait for the public release of the grand jury report, I would like to offer my heartfelt sympathy and support to all of those victims of abusive priests," he said. "It is a critical step in acknowledging what has occurred and beginning the process of healing for victims and so many others impacted by this tragedy.

Rhoades added, "During my time in Harrisburg and now in Fort Wayne-South Bend, I have upheld an unwavering commitment to child safety, closely following all policies and procedures put in place to punish those responsible for abuse. I followed all child protection policies and procedures, notified law enforcement and punished each individual as appropriate."

Release of the grand jury report and his letter in response "will eliminate any speculation regarding the decisions made during my tenure as bishop of the

Harrisburg Diocese," he said.

"As leaders, we have an obligation to protect those who cannot protect themselves. My commitment to this effort remains as strong today as it was during my time in Harrisburg," Rhoades said.