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More committees are not the answer to stop the abuse of children and vulnerable adults by clergy, said an Aug. 28 statement by the National Review Board, which is charged with addressing clerical sexual misconduct in the Catholic Church.

"What needs to happen is a genuine change in the church's culture, specifically among the bishops themselves," the board said. "This evil has resulted from a loss of moral leadership and an abuse of power that led to a culture of silence that enabled these incidents to occur.

"Intimidation, fear, and the misuse of authority created an environment that was taken advantage of by clerics, including bishops, causing harm to minors, seminarians, and those most vulnerable," the NRB said. "The culture of silence enabled the abuse to go on virtually unchecked. Trust was betrayed for the

victims/survivors of the abuse; the entire body of Christ was betrayed in turn by these crimes and the failure to act."

The purpose of the NRB, established in 2002 as part of the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People, is to work collaboratively with the U.S. bishops' Committee for the Protection of Children and Young People in preventing the sexual abuse of minors in the United States by persons in the service of the church.

But even the charter that created the NRB is wanting, the board's statement said.

"The members of the NRB have on numerous occasions pointed out the weaknesses in the charter given its deliberate ambiguity and its lack of inclusion of bishops. During the most recent revision process of the charter, many of the recommendations made by the NRB to strengthen the charter were not incorporated for a variety of reasons. These recommendations need to be reconsidered in light of the current situation, as well as the inclusion of bishops in the charter," the NRB said.

"The National Review Board has for several years expressed its concern that bishops not become complacent in their response to sexual abuse by the clergy. The recent revelations make it clear that the problem is much deeper."

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The statement said, "The episcopacy needs to be held accountable for these past actions, and in the future, for being complicit, either directly or indirectly, in the sexual abuse of the vulnerable. Holding bishops accountable will require an independent review into the actions of the bishop when an allegation comes to light."

The statement added, "The NRB also believes that the statement of Episcopal Commitment is ineffective and needs to be revised into a meaningful, actionable commitment.

"In particular, the notion of 'fraternal correction' must outline concrete steps that will be taken when a bishop is alleged to have committed sexual abuse or has failed to respond immediately and without hesitation when a cleric is accused of sexual abuse," it said.

"To ensure that bishops undertake their obligation to act decisively when they have knowledge of incidences of sexual abuse committed by the clergy or their brother bishops, there must be substantive formation of newly appointed bishops on their responsibility as moral leaders within the church, especially in responding to sexual abuse, something which is currently lacking.

The NRB offered itself as the body with which to entrust an independent review of allegations against bishops, as outlined by Cardinal Daniel DiNardo of Galveston-Houston, president of the U.S. bishops.

"The NRB, composed exclusively of lay members, would be the logical group to be involved in this task," it said. "An anonymous whistleblower policy, as is found in corporations, higher education and other institutions in both the public and private sector, that would be independent of the hierarchy with participation by the laity, perhaps the NRB, who would report allegations to the local bishop, local law enforcement, the nuncio and Rome, needs to be established immediately."