News



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An attorney for the U.S. Catholic Bishops conference has confirmed that federal officials have asked the organization to keep documents and other files that might pertain to possible sex abuse allegations and other matters and to order the same of all dioceses around the country.

"We have transmitted the U.S. attorney's letter at his request and in the spirit of cooperation with law enforcement," said Anthony Picarello, associate general secretary and general counsel for the bishops conference in an Oct. 29 email to Catholic News Service.

News reports in late October said U.S. Attorney William M. McSwain, of the Eastern District of Pennsylvania, sent the bishops' conference a letter and instructions about the preservation of documents in early October asking that it be sent around to the

country's 197 dioceses.

In mid-October, The Associated Press news agency said McSwain had started issuing subpoenas in Pennsylvania, where the state attorney general Aug. 14 released a grand jury report detailing decades of claims of sex abuse by clergy and other church workers in six of the state's Catholic dioceses.

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The report, which was the result of a monthslong probe into a 70-year period beginning in 1947, also claimed that church officials in many cases handled allegations of abuse byhiding them and brushing aside victims.

Since its release, more than a dozen attorneys general around the country have announced investigations of their own, seeking church records about what diocesan authorities knew of past abuse.

The New York Times said in an Oct. 26 story that the recent request for documents at the national level marks the first time federal authorities have looked on this scale at the church's handling of the abuse crisis.