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Denver Archbishop Samuel Aquila, on behalf of the bishops of Colorado's three Catholic dioceses, joined Colorado Attorney General Phil Weiser at a news conference Feb. 19 to announce several measures to address child sex abuse, including an independent review of records on abuse claims from the three dioceses.

The three dioceses also will fund an independent, voluntary program that will compensate victims of abuse, regardless of when the abuse occurred. A separate victims' support service will be created to assist victims/survivors with the reparations program and connect them with resources for future care.

"The damage inflicted upon young people and their families by sexual abuse, especially when it's committed by a trusted person like a priest, is profound," Aquila said. "While this process will certainly include painful moments and cannot ever fully restore what was lost, we pray that it will at least begin the healing process."

"We also acknowledge that the bright light of transparency needs to shine on the church's history related to the sexual abuse of minors," the archbishop said. "With humility and repentance, we hope the programs announced today offer a path to healing for survivors and their families."

In his statement Weiser said he was pleased "the church has recognized the need for transparency and reparations for victims."

"The sexual abuse of minors is a societal problem that demands attention and action. This independent review promises a full evaluation and inquiry. For any victims of sexual abuse, this will provide a recognition of past wrongdoing and offer an opportunity for healing," he added.

The independent review will be conducted by Robert Troyer, the former U.S. attorney for Colorado, with the full voluntary cooperation of the three dioceses: the Denver Archdiocese, which encompasses Northern Colorado and is headed by Aquila; the Colorado Springs Diocese, headed by Bishop Michael Sheridan; and the Pueblo Diocese, headed by Bishop Stephen Berg.

Troyer's public report is expected to be released by this fall, according to a news release from the Denver Archdiocese. To protect the privacy of victims of abuse, his report will not identify them by name.

The report will include:

– The names of diocesan priests with substantiated allegations of sexual abuse of minors.

– Details of the substantiated allegations of abuse, including the assignments of the accused priests and the years during which abuse is alleged to have occurred.

– A review of the historic response of the three dioceses to allegations of abuse.

– A review of the dioceses' current policies and procedures for preventing abuse and responding to allegations of abuse.

Former Colorado Attorney General Cynthia Coffman initiated the review process in the fall of 2018 and joined Aquila and Weiser in announcing the measures to address clergy sex abuse.

"It is my sincere hope that the independent review we announce today validates survivors of sexual abuse by priests and empowers them in their ongoing recovery," she said.

"All survivors deserve to be believed and supported on their road to healing," Coffman continued. "I am encouraged that the Catholic dioceses of Colorado have voluntarily agreed to this review by an outside party that, hopefully, allows victims an opportunity to have some healing and helps the church and its faithful move

forward from a place of truth and vigilance."

The review is not a criminal investigation and the church leaders and civil authorities said they had no knowledge of any previously unreported criminal conduct. If the review discovers any criminal conduct, they said, it will be immediately reported to the appropriate law enforcement authorities and be included in the public report.

Half of the fees for Troyer's work will be paid by the dioceses. The other half will be paid by private donors identified by the attorney general's office, according to a news release. At their request, donors will remain anonymous.

The independent, voluntary reparations program to be funded by the three dioceses will be developed and administered by two nationally recognized claims administration experts, Kenneth Feinberg and Camille Biros. They are working on similar programs in several dioceses in New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania.

Feinberg and Biros will review individual cases, including cases that are barred by the statute of limitations, and make financial awards to victims who elect to participate.

To ensure its independence, the program will be overseen by an independent committee chaired by former U.S. Sen. Hank Brown.

A separate and independent victims' support service will be created with professionals who can discuss the reparations program; hear stories of victim-survivors; assist the claimants in answering their questions about the reparations program; and provide support in submitting necessary documentation to the program.

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