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Charleston, W. Va. — March 20, 2019
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The attorney general of West Virginia has brought a civil suit against the Catholic Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston and its former bishop, Bishop Michael Bransfield, citing provisions of the West Virginia Consumer Credit and Protection Act.

The filing says that based on its investigation, the state attorney general's office claims that the diocese and Bransfield in past years violated the consumer law by failing "to disclose to consumers of its educational and recreational services that it employed priests and laity who have sexually abused children."

The suit defines "educational and recreational services" as the Catholic schools, summer camps and other entities in the statewide diocese.

A spokesman for the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston said a statement about the lawsuit would be forthcoming.

Archbishop William Lori of Baltimore has been apostolic administrator of the diocese since Sept. 13, 2018. The Vatican named him to the post the same day it announced the retirement of Bransfield as head of the diocese.

The Vatican gave Lori a mandate to investigate allegations of sexual harassment of adults and financial improprieties made against Bransfield.

On March 11, Lori announced that a preliminary investigation into the allegations had been completed and the findings were being forwarded to the Vatican for final judgment. At the same time, the archbishop announced restrictions on the bishop's ministry.

A news release from the Archdiocese of Baltimore March 11 noted that the preliminary investigation took place over five months. Lori conducted the investigation with the assistance of a team of five lay experts.

The investigative team examined multiple allegations of sexual harassment of adults and financial improprieties, according to the news release. It involved interviews with more than 40 individuals, including Bransfield.

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