News

by The Associated Press

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

February 27, 2020
Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

A congressman is asking the Department of Justice to investigate settlements to two men who say they were victims of clergy abuse at a Catholic school in Mississippi.

In a letter, U.S. Rep. Bennie Thompson says Catholic officials "exploited" the young men, The Clarion Ledger reported.

They were paid far less than what others have received through legal settlements with the church, the Mississippi Democrat said.

The request for an investigation comes after The Associated Press made details of the cases public in a story last year.

The two cousins told the AP they were repeatedly abused during the 1990s, as elementary school students at St. Francis of Assisi School in Greenwood, Mississippi. The cousins were each paid $15,000.

The settlements, Thompson wrote, were "far less than what many other sex abuse victims have received through legal settlements with the Catholic church."

He added that he believes church officials took advantage of La Jarvis Love and his cousin, Joshua Love, because they are black and poor, The Greenwood Commonwealth reported.

"There is a stark difference in the treatment of the financial settlements of survivors of abuse by Catholic officials in Mississippi because of their race and economic disparities," Thompson wrote.

In 2006, the Diocese of Jackson, Mississippi, settled a handful of lawsuits with 19 victims, 17 of whom were white, for $5 million and an average payout of more than $250,000 for each survivor. More recent settlements have ranged even higher, including an average payment of nearly $500,000 each for abuse survivors in the St. Paul-Minneapolis archdiocese.

The Franciscan order was established in the early 13th century by St. Francis of Assisi to evangelize and work among the poor.

Franciscan Friars from Wisconsin have been traveling to the Mississippi Delta in brown robes and sandals to fulfill that mission among the region's black residents since the early 1950s.

The group involved in the Mississippi cases is the Franklin, Wisconsin-based Franciscan Friars, Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary Province.

Advertisement