News

by The Associated Press

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Attorney General Josh Kaul plans to launch an investigation into clergy sexual assault across Wisconsin's five Catholic dioceses, perhaps as early as next week.

The Milwaukee Journal Sentinel reported Thursday that it obtained a letter Kaul wrote to the Milwaukee, Madison, Green Bay, La Crosse and Superior Dioceses warning them that the state Department of Justice would conduct a review.

Department of Justice spokeswoman Gillian Drummond declined to comment when reached by The Associated Press on Thursday, saying only that the agency will be making an announcement next week.

Kaul invited representatives from the dioceses to a meeting on Monday to discuss the next steps, the newspaper reported. The letter also asked diocese officials to preserve any relevant documents or information.

"I agree with the many survivors of clergy abuse, and those who support and have advocated for them, that a review by our office is necessary to provide accountability and, ultimately, healing," Kaul wrote. "I hope you will welcome that review."

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Clergy sexual abuse survivors and their allies have long demanded that Kaul open an investigation. Officials in at least 22 other states across the country have opened similar investigations into sexual misconduct within church hierarchies. Except for

Superior, all Wisconsin Catholic dioceses along with St. Norbert Abbey and the Society of Jesus have published lists of clergy with "credible" allegations against them.

Clergy sexual abuse in Wisconsin has come under renewed scrutiny since a man who accused three priests from St. Norbert Abbey in DePere of sexually abusing him in the 1980s killed himself last year. The man received $420,000 in secret payments from the abbey over 10 years until the abbey stopped sending checks in 2019.

Dan Blank, director of administrative services for the Superior Diocese, told the Journal Sentinel that leaders there expect to release a list of victims by the end of the year and will cooperate with Kaul's investigation.

Representatives from the other dioceses and St. Norbert Abbey didn't immediately respond to messages from the Journal Sentinel on Thursday. The Green Bay, La Crosse and Madison Dioceses didn't immediately reply to messages left by The Associated Press. The Milwaukee Archdiocese's voicemail would not accept a message.