News



Anthony Brown, Democratic nominee for Maryland attorney general, speaks at Bowie State University in Bowie, Md., Nov. 7, 2022. On Wednesday, April 5, 2023, the Maryland Attorney General's Office publicly released a redacted version of an investigative report detailing sex abuse allegations against more than 150 Catholic priests and examining the Archdiocese of Baltimore's response. (AP Photo/Julio Cortez, File)

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Baltimore — April 5, 2023
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More than 150 Catholic priests and others associated with the Archdiocese of Baltimore sexually abused more than 600 children over the past 80 years, according to a state report released April 5 that accused church officials of decades of cover-ups.

The report, issued by the Maryland Attorney General's Office, paints a damning picture of the archdiocese, which is the oldest Roman Catholic diocese in the country and spans much of Maryland. Some parishes, schools and congregations had more than one abuser at the same time — including St. Mark Parish in Catonsville, which had 11 abusers living and working there between 1964 and 2004.

"The staggering pervasiveness of the abuse itself underscores the culpability of the Church hierarchy," the report said. "The sheer number of abusers and victims, the depravity of the abusers' conduct, and the frequency with which known abusers were given the opportunity to continue preying upon children are astonishing. Over 600 children are known to have been abused by the 156 people included in this Report, but the number is likely far higher."

The disclosure of the redacted findings marks a significant development in an ongoing legal battle over their release and adding to growing evidence from parishes across the country as numerous similar revelations have rocked the Catholic Church in recent years. Also on April 5, the state legislature passed a bill to end a statute of limitations on abuse-related civil lawsuits, sending it to the governor.

Maryland Attorney General Anthony Brown, who took office in January, released the report. Before a news conference April 5, he met with several victims to summarize

the findings and thank them for coming forward.

"What we learned is that the incontrovertible history uncovered by this investigation is one of pervasive, pernicious and persistent abuse by priests and other Archdiocese personnel," Brown said during the news conference. "It’s also a history of repeated coverup of that abuse by the Catholic Church."

The report largely focuses on the years before 2002, when an investigation by the Boston Globe into abuse and coverup in the Archdiocese of Boston led to an explosion of revelations nationwide. The nation’s Catholic bishops, for the first time, agreed on reforms including a lifetime ban from ministry for any priest who commits even a single incident of abuse.

The report notes that while new national policies significantly improved the internal handling of reported abuse in the Baltimore archdiocese after 2002, there were still flaws, including that its public list of abusers didn’t include everyone it knew about; its independent review board is limited by the information church officials provide about alleged abuse; and some alleged abusers were allowed to retire, with financial support, rather than be ousted.

Brown's predecessor Brian Frosh launched the probe in 2019 and announced its completion in November, saying investigators had reviewed over 100,000 pages of documents dating back to the 1940s and interviewed hundreds of victims and witnesses. The report’s contents weren’t immediately released because they include information obtained from church officials via grand jury subpoenas, which are confidential proceedings in Maryland.

Lawyers for the state asked a court for permission to release the nearly 500-page document, which identifies 156 priests and others associated with the church accused of abusing more than 600 victims over the past 80 years, and Baltimore Circuit Court Judge Robert Taylor ruled last month that a redacted version should be made public. Officials recently started making the necessary redactions, including removing the names and titles of 37 people accused of wrongdoing.

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He also said Maryland legislators should be able to consider the report’s contents during the ongoing legislative session, which ends April 10. That timeline meant the

report became public during Holy Week, which concludes Lent and is considered the most sacred time of year in Christianity ahead of Easter Sunday.

Lawmakers' passage of a bill to end the state’s statute of limitations came after similar proposals failed in recent years. The issue received renewed attention this session. Gov. Wes Moore has said he supports it. Currently, victims of child sex abuse in Maryland can’t sue after they turn 38. The bill would eliminate the age limit and allow for retroactive lawsuits.

Baltimore Archbishop William Lori said in a statement April 3 that while the archdiocese made great strides over the past three decades to address abuse allegations, the report “covers a period in the Archdiocese's past when our response to allegations was woefully inadequate.”

In addition to directing prosecutors to redact the identities of 37 people from the report, Taylor told the attorney general to rephrase pieces of the document to avoid identifying 60 other people. The court will consider releasing a more complete version in the future.

The investigation also revealed that the archdiocese failed to report many allegations of sexual abuse to authorities, conduct adequate investigations, remove abusers from the ministry or restrict their access to children.

In some cases, victims ended up reporting abuse to priests who were abusive themselves, prosecutors wrote.

The Archdiocese of Baltimore has long faced scrutiny over its handling of abuse allegations.

In 2002, Cardinal William Keeler, who served as Baltimore archbishop for nearly two decades, released a list of 57 priests accused of sexual abuse, earning himself a reputation for transparency at a time when the nationwide scope of wrongdoing remained largely unexposed. That changed, however, when Keeler was named in a sweeping Pennsylvania grand jury report. The 2018 report presented extensive evidence of a far-reaching coverup that often involved transferring accused clergy to other parishes instead of holding them accountable.

In Keeler’s case, the grand jury accused him of covering up sexual abuse allegations while serving as bishop of Harrisburg in the 1980s. Keeler later allowed the accused clergy member, now-defrocked John G. Allen, to transfer to Baltimore and continue

working. Not long after the report became public, church officials announced the archdiocese was changing its plans to name a new Catholic school after Keeler, who had died the previous year.