News

Former Cardinal Theodore McCarrick wears a mask during arraignment at Dedham District Co

Former Cardinal Theodore McCarrick wears a mask during arraignment at Dedham District Court in Dedham, Mass., Sept. 3, 2021, after being charged with molesting a 16-year-old boy during a 1974 wedding reception. (OSV News photo/David L Ryan, Pool via Reuters)

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Former Catholic Cardinal Theodore McCarrick is not competent to stand trial on charges accusing him of sexually assaulting a teenage boy in Massachusetts decades ago, an expert for the prosecution says, raising doubts about the future of the criminal case against the 92-year-old.

Prosecutors this week disclosed the findings of their expert to the judge, who will ultimately rule on the once-powerful American prelate's ability to face charges that he abused the boy at a wedding reception at Wellesley College in 1974.

McCarrick has maintained that he is innocent, and pleaded not guilty in September 2021. He was also charged in Aprilwith sexually assaulting an 18-year-old man in Wisconsin more than 45 years ago.

In February, McCarrick's attorneys asked the court to dismiss the case, saying a professor of psychiatry and behavioral science at the Johns Hopkins University

School of Medicine had examined him and concluded that he has dementia, likely Alzheimer's disease.

At that time, lawyers said McCarrick had a "limited understanding" of the criminal proceedings against him, but that "his progressive and irreparable cognitive deficits render him unable to meaningfully consult with counsel or to effectively assist in his own defense."

Prosecutors later hired their own expert to assess McCarrick, who filed their own report on the man's competency, which has not been made public. The judge set a hearing on the matter for Aug. 30.

McCarrick, who lives in Dittmer, Missouri, was charged with three counts of indecent assault and battery on a person over 14. He was not exempt from facing charges because the clock stopped on the statute of limitations when he left Massachusetts.

Mitchell Garabedian, a well-known lawyer for clergy sexual abuse victims who is representing the man accusing McCarrick, said June 29 that his client is "obviously discouraged" by the prosecution expert's findings. He said his client remains determined to continue with lawsuits he has filed in other states.

"By proceeding with the civil lawsuits my client is empowering himself, other clergy sexual abuse victims and making the world a safer place for children," Garabedian said.

The Associated Press generally doesn't identify people who report sexual assault unless they agree to be named publicly, which the victim in this case has not done.

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The accuser told authorities during a 2021 interview that McCarrick was close to the man's family when he was growing up. Prosecutors say McCarrick would attend family gatherings and travel on vacations with them and that the victim referred to the priest as "Uncle Ted."

Prosecutors say McCarrick abused him over several years including when the boy, who was then 16, was at his brother's wedding reception at Wellesley College.

Prosecutors say McCarrick told the boy his dad wanted him to have a talk with the priest because the boy was "being mischievous at home and not attending church." The man told investigators that they took a walk around campus, and McCarrick groped him before they went back to the party. The man said McCarrick also sexually assaulted him in a coat room after they returned to the reception, authorities wrote in the documents.

Prosecutors say McCarrick told the boy to say the "Hail Mary" and "Our Father" prayers before leaving the room.

Ordained as a priest in New York City in 1958, McCarrick was defrocked by Pope Francis in 2019 after a Vatican investigation determined he sexually molested adults as well as children. An internal Vatican investigation found that bishops, cardinals and popes downplayed or dismissed reports of sexual misconduct over many years.

The case created a credibility crisis for the church since the Vatican had reports from authoritative cardinals dating to 1999 that McCarrick's behavior was problematic, yet he became an influential cardinal, kingmaker and emissary of the Holy See's "soft diplomacy."