News



Former Washington Archbishop Theodore McCarrick listens during a news conference in Washington, May 16, 2006. A Wisconsin judge on Wednesday, Jan. 10, 2024, ruled that the former Catholic cardinal is not competent to stand trial, due to a diagnosis of dementia, suspending charges of sexually assaulting a boy in the 1970s. (AP Photo/J. Scott Applewhite, File)

by Associated Press

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A Wisconsin judge suspended charges against defrocked Roman Catholic Cardinal Theodore McCarrick, accused of sexually assaulting a boy in the 1970s, ruling Jan. 10 that the former cleric is incompetent for trial because of dementia.

The decision will be reviewed at the end of the year, according to court records.

McCarrick, who did not appear in person for the hearing but listened in by phone, was charged with sexually assaulting an 18-year-old man more than 45 years ago, court records show. A criminal complaint alleges he fondled the man in 1977 while staying at a cabin on Geneva Lake in southeastern Wisconsin.

The alleged victim, who was not named, also told investigators that McCarrick had repeatedly sexually assaulted him since he was 11 and even brought him to parties where other adult men abused him, according to the complaint.

McCarrick's Wisconsin attorney did not immediately respond to an email request for comment.

Peter Isely, program director of Nate's Mission, a Wisconsin-based project of Ending Clergy Abuse, issued a statement saying the charge "would bring McCarrick to some kind of justice. For a victim to see his offender before a judge — even if that appearance is by phone — it can be a day of emancipation and liberation from carrying the awful burden of shame and secrecy that are an inevitable consequence of these crimes."

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McCarrick was removed from the priesthood in 2019 after a Vatican investigation found he had sexually molested adults and children.

He became the highest-ranking Catholic official in the U.S. to face criminal charges for sexual abuse when he was accused in 2021 of assaulting a teenage boy at a wedding reception in Massachusetts in 1974. His attorneys asked the judge earlier this year to dismiss the charges in that case, saying McCarrick, now 92 and suffering from dementia, was not competent to stand trial.

The once-powerful priest was ordained in 1958 and became archbishop in Newark, New Jersey, in 1986 and then archbishop of Washington, D.C., in 2000, rising to

power despite church officials' knowledge of accusations against him. A two-year Vatican investigation into McCarrick's tenure found credible reports of his problematic behavior dating back to 1999, including an inquiry confirming that he slept with seminarians.

The church has confirmed it made financial settlements with adults who accused McCarrick of sexual misconduct. The cardinal retired in 2006 but continued to be active in political circles until he was defrocked by Pope Francis in 2019.

Wisconsin prosecutors learned of the alleged 1977 assault through a program dedicated to prosecuting instances of abuse by faith leaders, they said in a statement at the time McCarrick was charged. Officials were able to charge him because the statute of limitations does not apply to people who are not residents of the state. A similar law allowed Massachusetts prosecutors to bring their case against McCarrick more than 40 years later.

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