News



Brooklyn Bishop Robert Brennan addresses the congregation during Mass at All Saints Church in the East Williamsburg section of Brooklyn April 7. (OSV News/The Tablet/Gregory Shemitz)



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The Catholic Diocese of Brooklyn has agreed to the appointment of an independent monitor to oversee its handling of clergy abuse cases, as part of a settlement with New York Attorney General Letitia James.

The agreement, announced on April 16, marks the second such accord secured by James with a Catholic diocese, following a similar settlement with the Diocese of Buffalo in 2022. Under the new terms, the independent monitor will be tasked with overseeing compliance with enhanced policies and procedures in the Brooklyn Diocese.

The monitor will also have to issue an annual report assessing the diocese's handling of sexual abuse cases, which will have to be published on the diocese's website.

In her statement announcing the move, James said it comes after an investigation by her office "found that the Diocese failed to consistently comply with its own policies and procedures for responding to sexual abuse." The diocese's policies, she said, "were not adequate to guarantee the safety and protection of children."

Brooklyn Bishop Robert Brennan, who has led the diocese since 2021, said in a separate statement that the agreement "concludes a difficult period in the life of the church."

"While the Church should have been a sanctuary, I am deeply sorry that it was a place of trauma for the victims of clergy sexual abuse," he said in the statement.

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As part of the agreement, the Brooklyn Diocese will also be required to strengthen existing policies and procedures for handling sexual abuse cases, with an emphasis on expediting review timelines and maintaining transparency throughout the investigative process.

To speed up processing of accusations, the diocese agreed to the creation of an online confidential portal and dedicated telephone number for complaint submissions and a whistleblower policy to shield complainants from reprisals by diocesan officials. In its statement, the diocese said it first set up a telephone reporting line in 2003.

The diocese has also pledged to expedite abuse investigations, ensuring acknowledgment of complaints within five business days and a determination of credibility within 20 days by the bishop.

The Brooklyn diocesean review board, which is tasked with evaluating claims of abuse, will have to complete investigations in no more than nine months. The diocese will also have to forward all complaints to law enforcement and cooperate with their investigations.

James' April 16 statement detailed specific past instances of alleged mishandling of abuse cases within the diocese, including two cases where credible accusations were allegedly not promptly disclosed to the public, resulting in accused priests allegedly continuing to work without adequate monitoring.

In one case mentioned by the AG's office, the diocese is accused of not revealing allegations against a priest who "had repeatedly sexually abused minors" and was laicized in 2007 until it released a list of removed priests in 2017. During the intervening decade, the individual worked as a professor at two universities.

In its April 16 statement, the diocese said it gave "full cooperation" to the New York state investigation and was "the first diocese in the state to initiate meetings and voluntarily produce documents and information to the office of the attorney general (OAG) in an attempt to have the policies for the handling of sexual abuse allegations looked at closely to ensure the best practices are in place for handling such allegations."

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