



New Orleans Archbishop Gregory Aymond talks with NOLA.com|The Times Picayune at the archdiocese office in New Orleans, March 27, 2019. (AP/NOLA.com/The Advocate/David Grunfeld)

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The New Orleans Archdiocese on Monday agreed to a \$230 million proposed settlement for survivors of clergy sexual abuse, attorneys for some of the survivors said Monday. The agreement paves the way for a final resolution to yearslong negotiations amid a [series of similar settlements](#) from the Catholic Church.

The archdiocese had announced in May that it would pay [at least \\$179.2 million](#) in response to more than 500 abuse claims, which the bloc of attorneys said they opposed because they considered it to be lowballing the hundreds of survivors.

"We knew this was a bad deal, and we knew we could do better; and we have," the group of 10 attorneys said in a statement. "The 'power of no' forced the Archdiocese to come up with significantly more money."

The archdiocese had filed for bankruptcy in May 2020 rather than handle each abuse claim separately, which survivors point out allows church leadership to avoid facing tough questions in court. The archdiocese called the updated settlement a "significant step forward for the benefit of all claimant survivors" in an emailed statement.

Survivors have until late October to vote on whether or not to approve the settlement. If approved by two-thirds of survivors, payments could begin disbursement by next year.

"At this point, I'm not aware of a single attorney for an abuse survivor that opposes the plan," said Brad Knapp, an attorney for a committee representing abuse survivors. "With all the abuse survivors' attorneys supporting it, I think there's much less chance that it gets voted down."

The archdiocese's bankruptcy is one of the longest running and most contentious of more than a dozen ongoing Catholic Church bankruptcy cases in the U.S. related to sex abuse, according to Terence McKiernan, president of the nonprofit [BishopAccountability.org](#).

Judge Meredith Grabill, overseeing the bankruptcy proceedings in federal court, has warned that if the settlement is not approved, then she will dismiss the case.

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If a bankruptcy settlement fails, survivors would be required to seek compensation for their abuse claims through new lawsuits, which could take years to play out in courts. And it raises the prospect that the archdiocese would declare bankruptcy again to delay payments, according to a public letter from the Official Committee of Unsecured Creditors. The committee represents the interests of abuse survivors in the bankruptcy case and urged survivors to accept the initial settlement offer.

The committee warned that bringing individual abuse claims in court would likely lead to difficult confrontations with an "aggressive and hostile" archdiocese, which could force survivors and their friends and family to engage in tough depositions and years of appeals, exacerbating survivors' "emotional and psychological pain."

"A lot of survivors are ready for this to be resolved," said Kristi Schubert, an attorney representing dozens of survivors. "A lot of them would prefer to receive certain money now."

But some survivors, like Kevin Bourgeois, say that monetary compensation only goes so far.

"There is no dollar amount that really is equitable considering that abuse survivors live for the rest of their lives putting their lives back together," said Bourgeois, a New Orleans native who suffered clergy sexual abuse and settled privately prior to 2020. He pointed out that the bankruptcy process allows the church to "wear people down" and keep the public in the dark about the extent to which it enabled abuse.

The settlement as outlined in May requires the archdiocese to bring in outside experts to evaluate its child-protection programs and recommend improvements. The archdiocese would also establish a document archive at a secular university related to its abuse and hold public forums for survivors to share their experiences and concerns with the archbishop.

"I remain very hopeful and committed to bringing this bankruptcy to a conclusion that benefits the survivors of abuse," said New Orleans Archbishop Gregory Aymond in a Monday statement. "Please know that I pray for the survivors of abuse every day and look forward to the opportunity to meet with them to hear their stories..."

Aymond has resisted the chorus of survivors calling for his resignation over the church's failure to take action on allegations against priests for decades.

The accusations of archdiocese clergy abuse triggered a [sweeping FBI probe](#) and a cascading crisis for the Catholic Church, which drew on help from New Orleans Saints executives to help behind the scenes with damage control, an [AP investigation revealed](#).