News



Former SNAP members protest outside the fall 2023 plenary assembly of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops in Baltimore. From left to right are Frank Schindler, Judy Lorenz, David Lorenz and Teresa Lancaster. (Courtesy of David Lorenz)



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Citing long-running disagreements over governance and operational structure, a group of at least two dozen local leaders and members with several decades of experience meeting with and advocating for survivors of clergy sexual abuse have left the Survivors Network of Those Abused by Priests to start their own group.

In resignation letters and in interviews with National Catholic Reporter, several of the now-former SNAP members said they had also lost faith in the organization's board of directors, which they characterized as arrogant, authoritarian and dishonest.

"This has been coming for a couple of years. We finally just said, 'Enough is enough. We're done,' " David Lorenz told NCR.

Lorenz, a clergy sex abuse survivor who had been a member of SNAP for 20 years and most recently served as the organization's state director in Maryland, submitted his resignation letter along with other local leaders of the organization on March 23.

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To continue their work with survivors, the departing SNAP leaders announced the formation of a new organization called the Abuse Survivors Coalition, which they described as a peer-led group "informed by decades of collective experience in survivor support and advocacy."

In individual resignation letters, copies of which were presented to NCR, the former SNAP leaders described a relationship with the board of directors that had deteriorated over the past 18 months. The conflict dates to September 2024, when several local leaders said they tried raising concerns about SNAP's operational practices and organizational direction.

"All we wanted to do was meet with [the board], and discuss some issues but it was the refusal of the board to meet with us, to acknowledge us, even to treat us with a certain type of respect," said Frank Schindler, a survivor of childhood sexual abuse

and Maryland resident who had been a member of SNAP for nine years.

"That's all we wanted, was a meeting with the board. It's just that nobody on the board was open to hear the truth about what was happening," said Teresa Lancaster, a survivor of clergy sexual abuse and attorney in Maryland resident who had been a SNAP member since 1999.

> 'Unfortunately, there is plenty of work to go around. They may be going in a different direction, but in the end, we're both on the same side. We want to help survivors.'
> —Angela Walker
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SNAP Executive Director Angela Walker pushed back on the charge that the organization's board of directors refused to meet with local leaders. She said there were several meetings between herself, the board and the leaders that culminated in a facilitated three-hour Zoom meeting in October.

"The fact that they are saying [the meeting] didn't happen is problematic," said Walker, who said that not everyone in the organization supported SNAP's three-year plan that started in 2024.

Since adopting the plan, SNAP has hired its first executive director recruited from outside the organization, overhauled its website, implemented a new social media policy, expanded the board of directors, and instituted new digital and communications practices, among other reforms.

"Change is hard," Walker said, adding that some members did not want to see SNAP - which had largely been a volunteer-run organization since its founding in the late 1980s - professionalized or changed.

Walker said the former local leaders and members submitted their resignations about a week after SNAP shared a set of new norms that Walker said was intended to make the organization "a safe environment for all stakeholders." Among those norms were new guidelines for communication, survivor privacy and transparency in governance.

"The impetus for [the resignations] seemed to be the new communication guidelines," said Walker, who added that about 100 local leaders remain with SNAP.

Supporters of SNAP, the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests, walk in memory of alle

Supporters of SNAP, the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests, walk in memory of alleged abuse victims outside the 2018 assembly of the U.S. bishops in Baltimore. (CNS/Catholic Review/Catholic Review)

Several of the former SNAP leaders and members also told NCR that they took offense at the organization's new website, which was revamped in November and which they said no longer includes contact information for local leaders or support groups. However, Walker said the website does offer survivors help in finding peer support. "They tell us their needs and then we match them with the best group that would meet their interests," she said.

Still, a sense of alienation remains between SNAP and its former members.

"The new leadership has abandoned survivors," said Tim Lennon, a former SNAP board member who served as president of the board for three years. Lennon, a clergy sex abuse survivor who joined SNAP in 1995 and lives in Arizona, said that the current leadership has moved the organization away from its roots as a peer network of survivors.

"My belief is that they took SNAP away from us," he said.

In a press release announcing the resignations, the now former SNAP leaders and members indicated that they did not agree with some of the recent changes, which they said had resulted in differing views between them and the organization's board of directors regarding organizational roles, decision-making processes and strategic direction. They said SNAP had been founded as a decentralized, peer-driven organization with an emphasis on survivor leadership and local engagement.

"After careful consideration, the departing leaders concluded that continued affiliation with SNAP was no longer consistent with their understanding of survivor-led organizational principles," the press release said.

In addition to differences of opinion over SNAP's evolution as a national nonprofit are grievances from former local leaders over how they say they were treated by the

organization's board of directors and what they regard as instances of the national leadership being dishonest and underhanded.

In Lorenz's resignation letter, for instance, he accused a SNAP board member of falsely telling members that the organization never made money from its annual conferences, only to tell a federal judge a different story while testifying during a former employee's unemployment hearing. In that same hearing, Lorenz said, the organization disingenuously described another member as not having been properly vetted to attend a leaders' meeting.

"For this reason, and dozens of others … I believe that SNAP leadership can no longer be trusted by me or by survivors in general," Lorenz wrote.

Msgr. Ron Lengwin, vicar for church relations for the Diocese of Pittsburgh, speaks with abuse

Msgr. Ron Lengwin, vicar for church relations for the Diocese of Pittsburgh, speaks with abuse victim Jim VanSickle of Pittsburgh during an Aug. 20, 2018, news conference held by members of the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests (SNAP) in front of the diocese's building. (CNS/Chaz Muth)

In interviews with NCR, the former SNAP leaders and members said they tried engaging the board in September 2024 to discuss concerns they had after SNAP's annual conference that August. Among their stated concerns were questions over the organization's financial transparency, a perceived lack of communication between SNAP leaders and members, and the decision to hold social gatherings at a hotel bar during the conference.

There were also "a number of concerns" with SNAP's national leadership, said Schindler, who added that his primary concern was "the general lack of accountability."

"If you have a position in leadership, it comes with a lot of authority, but it also comes with a lot of responsibility," he said. "You have to be responsible to those you supervise and that you provide a service to. You have to be transparent, you have to be honest, and I didn't think the board was doing that."

Lorenz and other leaders said they sought a meeting with the board to discuss their concerns, but instead received "vindictive, insulting emails" from a board member who questioned their motives. They said the board hired an arbitrator to mediate a

Zoom meeting, but then refused to meet with the leaders because most of them had not been vetted by the organization.

"They're just like the Catholic Church," Lorenz said. "They won't talk to us. They treat us like we're nobodies."

Susan Vance, a former SNAP leader in Knoxville, Tennessee, was among the 12 local leaders who she said requested a meeting with the organization's board of directors. She told NCR that the group did not tell any other leaders about their efforts for several months.

"We never wanted any of this to happen," said Vance, who had been a SNAP member for 24 years. "In the history of SNAP, there have been many ups and downs with the board, but this is what's different with this board. They have attacked the very people at the grassroots doing the work. We just can't do it anymore."

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Walker said that shortly after becoming SNAP's executive director in July 2025, she tried to accommodate the leaders and listen to their concerns, organizing meetings and even commissioning an anonymous survey for them to explain what they believe the organization's key issues should be and what they believed would be a constructive resolution.

The survey "was very comprehensive," said Walker, who wished the outgoing leaders and members well.

"I know they are still committed to helping survivors," Walker said. "Unfortunately, there is plenty of work to go around. They may be going in a different direction, but in the end, we're both on the same side. We want to help survivors."