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Belleville diocese loses appeal; \$5 million verdict

by Zoe Ryan

NCR Today

From the Belleville News-Democrat:

In a decision made public Thursday, the 5th District Appellate Court in Mount Vernon rejected arguments by the Catholic Diocese of Belleville that a 2008 civil trial jury verdict that awarded \$5 million to a former altar boy allegedly sexually abused by a priest should be overturned.

In an 85-page decision, of which nearly half was dedicated to a summary of decades of sexual abuse against boys and at least one girl allegedly committed by the Rev. Raymond Kownacki and repeated coverups of this activity by former diocese officials, the three-member panel of judges voted 2-1 to uphold the verdict.

Kownacki was removed from priestly duties in 1995 by a diocesan review board after numerous articles in the News-Democrat about sexual abuse by local priests. Kownacki, who has stated he will not comment, lives in Dupon.

The Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests (SNAP) issued a statement today regarding the decision.

In July of 2009, the Belleville News-Democrat reported on the issue of possibly having Belleville Bishop Edward Braxton and former Bishop Wilton Gregory testify.

In a different case in 2009, an Illinois Supreme Court upheld a local judge's decision to toss out a civil lawsuit, citing the statute of limitations. Even though the statute of limitations applied in the Kownacki trial, the case went through because the diocese was found to have engaged in "fraudulent concealment"

by not informing parishioners that Kownacki had sexually abused children, the News-Democrat reported.

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