



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Brad Hoylman-Sigal

# **The Pope Asks 1.2 Billion Catholics to Stand With Survivors of CSA and Help Ensure Justice. Will Senate Republicans Heed His Call?**

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New York, NY – Assemblymember Linda B. Rosenthal (D/WF-Manhattan) and State Senator Brad Hoylman (D/WF-Manhattan), sponsors of New York State’s Child Victims Act (A.5885-A/S.6575), along with survivors and advocates of childhood sexual assault, issued the following statement after Pope Francis released an unprecedented letter to 1.2 billion Catholics worldwide acknowledging the pain suffered by survivors of sexual assault at the hands of priests and taking responsibility for the vast cover-up that allowed the abuse to continue for years unabated. The letter comes on the heels of shocking revelations contained in a Pennsylvania grand jury report detailing the sexual abuse of more than 1,000 children and individuals by more than 300 priests over 70 years.

In the letter, Pope Francis expresses support for judicial remedies such as the Child Victims Act: “May fasting and prayer open our ears to the hushed pain felt by children, young people and the disabled. A fasting that can make us hunger and thirst for justice and impel us to walk in the truth, supporting all judicial measures that may be necessary.”

Assemblymember Linda B. Rosenthal said, “According to Pope Francis, the Lord stands with survivors of sexual assault. And yet, the State Senate Republicans have deliberately chosen to stand with abusers instead. Though the Pope calls for ‘accountability’ for anyone who perpetrated or covered up a sex crime against a child, the Senate Republicans have blocked the Child Victims Act for years, preferring instead to side with the likes of the Catholic League, which calls ‘fake news’ on the stories of survivors and blows homophobic dog whistles.”

State Senator Brad Hoylman said, “There can be no question about it. Pope Francis unequivocally stated yesterday that ‘no effort must be spared’ to prevent child sexual abuse from ‘being covered up and perpetuated.’ I hope the Senate Republicans take the Pope’s words to heart and join Senate Democrats in supporting the Child Victims Act, the legislation that will finally help uncover the extent of child sexual abuse in New York and give survivors their day in court.”

The Pope’s letter, perhaps the first time a sitting Pope has addressed all Catholics in writing on sexual assault, reflects the breadth of the sexual assault crisis, and promises that ‘no effort must be spared to create a culture able to prevent such [abuses] from happening, but also to prevent the possibility of their being covered up and perpetuated.’

The Pennsylvania grand jury report details a vast cover-up by church officials in that state to shuffle offending priests around to avoid discovery or prosecution. Of the priests accused in the report, 27 served in Catholic organizations or committed acts of abuse in New York State. Among others things, the PA report recommended the state reform its statute of limitations to allow survivors of sexual assault to bring civil claims against their abusers.

Though Church officials have for years denied knowledge of sexual abuse by priests, a recent investigation by the New York Times reveals that the highest officials in the Vatican, up to and even including previous Popes, may have been made aware of inappropriate criminal sexual behavior, yet took no action to stop it.

“The Pennsylvania grand jury report is proof of concept for the need of the Child Victims Act in New York. The grand jury identified sexual abuse involving more than 300 priests and at least one thousand child victims. But because of a systematic cover-up over the course of 70 years, almost every instance of abuse they found was too old to be prosecuted. We can address this problem here in New York by passing the Child Victims Act, which would lift the statute of limitations for crimes of child sexual abuse and give adult survivors one year to bring civil lawsuits against their abusers and the institutions that may have harbored them,” said State Senator Brad Hoylman.

“In the Church and in society at large, sexual abuse persists, in large part, because of a culture of secrecy that shames victims and protects predators. The Pennsylvania grand jury report makes clear that no institution can be trusted to police itself when it comes to sex abuse, and that we need to shine the brightest light we have to protect our children, who are the most important and vulnerable. That light is the Child Victims Act, which the Assembly has passed numerous times. The State Senate must pass the CVA now to ensure that any child who suffered ‘wounds that would never go away’ as a result of the ‘culture of death’ have an opportunity for justice and healing,” said Assemblymember Linda B. Rosenthal.”

Dr. Kevin Braney, survivor of childhood sexual abuse by Catholic priests in Syracuse, “The facts speak for themselves: 1 in 4 girls and 1 in 7 boys are sexual abuse victims. The sexual abuse of children by persons in a position of trust is a societal problem not limited to the Catholic Church. However, the PA Grand Jury report provides stinging clarity to the extent institutional power was used to perpetuate, enable, and ultimately fund the rape and torture of thousands of Catholic children. Church leaders must face a commensurate response from law enforcement and society. Political leaders must give our judicial system the power to ensure that no more children are harmed and victims can find justice.”

“As a prepubescent boy while attending grammar school at Nativity School in the Buffalo Diocese, I was groomed and ultimately raped by the Monsignor Sylvester Holbel. During this time the culture of the school allowed at least 2 priests to abuse multiple children. After years of abuse I went to a nun and a family member for help. I was told I was a liar that a priest would never do such a thing and was immediately silenced by those in a position to protect me. These experiences have had a profound impact on my entire being and led to years of suicidal ideation, depression, substance abuse and an inability to build a productive meaningful life for

myself,” said Tom Travers, survivor of rape by a priest in the Buffalo Diocese, lives in Buffalo, NY.

“I was abused at a Catholic HS for a whole school year by a faculty member and when I contacted the school principal, school board president, head of the order that ran the school and the diocese that oversaw the school, they all ignored me,” said Brian Toale, survivor of CSA.

“How can any individual who purports to be called to the service of God and people abuse children and then do everything possible to cover up the crime? It is time for Albany to put a spotlight on this issue so we can finally find some justice,” said Cecelia Springer, abused as a child by a nun in her Catholic school.

“In light of the recommendations of the Pennsylvania grand jury that Pennsylvania change its statute of limitations laws regarding child sexual abuse, it behooves the Senate of New York State to enact similar reforms to guarantee victims their day in court,” said Robert M. Hoatson, PhD, Road to Recovery, Inc.

“When I was raped by a priest in the Buffalo Diocese, I immediately told my mother who contacted a nun acting as an administrator at the church. I was called a liar and was immediately silenced by those in a position to protect me. The shame and sorrow I felt in those moments led to years of suicidal ideation, depression and addiction,” said Thomas Travers, survivor of abuse by a priest in the Buffalo Diocese.

“The Roman Catholic Church is not the only institution that has a history of putting its own self-interests above the needs to survivors and the community at large. We need comprehensive legislation like the Child Victims Act to address the needs of victims in all public and private settings and make clear that the culture of silence these powerful institutions created for decades will not stand,” said Robert Cosgrove, who was abused by a teacher at St. Paul's Episcopal School in Garden City, NY.

The Child Victims Act would extend New York’s statute of limitation for child sexual assault and create a one-year lookback window within which survivors would be able

to initiate claims against their abusers in cases where the statute of limitations has expired. New York's existing statute of limitations, considered among the most restrictive in the nation, gives survivors only until the age of 23 at most to file a claim. The legislation, which has existed in one form or another for nearly 13 years, has passed the Assembly by wide margins in 2017 and 2018, but has stalled in the State Senate as a result of Republican opposition.

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