

Office of the Massachusetts Attorney General

**SEXUAL ABUSE OF CHILDREN
IN THE ROMAN CATHOLIC DIOCESES OF
FALL RIVER, SPRINGFIELD, AND WORCESTER**



2026

This report contains descriptions of child sexual abuse, assault, and trauma.

Resources and support for survivors of child sexual abuse and those impacted can be found at the Office of the Attorney General's website at mass.gov/ago/2026diocesereport

MESSAGE FROM MASSACHUSETTS ATTORNEY GENERAL ANDREA JOY CAMPBELL

For too long, survivors of clergy sexual abuse in Massachusetts have carried the devastating consequences of what was done to them, often in silence. Today, the Attorney General's Office is releasing the findings of its multi-year investigation to acknowledge the truth, honor survivors, and confront the systemic failures that allowed abuse to occur, and, in some cases, continue for many years.

Our investigation found evidence that more than 270 Catholic clerics abused nearly 1,000 children over the course of a century in the Dioceses of Fall River, Springfield, and Worcester. While previous investigations and public reporting exposed widespread abuse and institutional failures in the Archdiocese of Boston, this is the first comparable public accounting of what occurred in these three dioceses.

Since 2019, our attorneys and investigators reviewed more than 300,000 pages of documents and interviewed more than 100 individuals, including survivors, advocates, attorneys representing survivors, clergy, diocesan personnel, and experts in canon law and child sexual abuse. We examined not only individual allegations of abuse, but how diocesan leaders responded when allegations were made, whether their own policies were followed, and whether children were adequately protected.

Throughout this investigation, our Office remained focused on three goals: telling the truth about what happened, seeking criminal accountability wherever the law allows, and identifying what still must change to better protect children and support survivors.

What we found was deeply troubling. Over decades, diocesan leaders failed to adequately respond to allegations and warning signs; transferred accused and offending priests to other parishes without disclosing the reasons for those transfers; returned priests to ministry following treatment without adequate supervision; failed to meaningfully enforce restrictions; concealed the reasons priests were removed from ministry; and failed to consistently report allegations to law enforcement.

We deeply understand that behind every number is a child whose safety was violated, a family that was changed, and a survivor who has carried the trauma of that abuse for years, and in many cases, decades.

To the survivors who came forward: THANK YOU. I am beyond grateful for your courage and willingness to speak with us about deeply traumatic events. Your words shed light on events that long remained hidden in the dark and were essential to the thoroughness and thoughtfulness of this investigation. I am also thankful for your patience as we undertook the work to ensure this report was publicly released.

Our victim witness advocates worked closely with survivors throughout every step of this process, and many survivors courageously provided written accounts of what they endured as children. Their powerful statements are included in an appendix to this report, in their own words.

This investigation was not simply about documenting what happened in the past. Survivors and their attorneys repeatedly shared with us how extraordinarily difficult it can be to obtain accountability and justice – whether through criminal prosecution, civil litigation, or the Church itself.

Our Office carefully examined whether criminal prosecution remained possible. Some conduct was not a crime under Massachusetts law at the time it occurred and cannot be prosecuted retroactively. Other misconduct newly-identified by this investigation occurred outside the applicable statute of limitations. Sadly, these legal limitations mean that our Office is unable to seek criminal charges, and there were no new indictments arising from this investigation. However, these legal limitations do not diminish the seriousness of the conduct documented in this report.

Criminal prosecution is an important tool for holding individual perpetrators accountable, but civil liability can also play a critical role in addressing the systemic failures that allowed abuse to occur and continue, and in providing survivors with meaningful remedies for the harm they experienced.

Yet, Massachusetts law continues to create significant barriers. Survivors may be prevented from bringing claims by the statute of limitations, despite the reality that childhood sexual abuse is often disclosed years or decades later. The Commonwealth's charitable immunity cap remains at \$20,000 — unchanged since 1971 — and, survivors whose claims have already expired have no opportunity to seek relief.

For these reasons, the Attorney General's Office supports the passage of legislation that would eliminate the statute of limitations for civil claims involving childhood sexual abuse, eliminate the charitable immunity cap for any claims of childhood sexual abuse, and create an indefinite lookback period for civil claims of childhood sexual abuse so survivors whose claims have expired have an opportunity to seek justice.

But accountability cannot come from the courts or Legislature alone. The Church itself holds an even more significant role. The report provides specific recommendations for the dioceses, including how to: apply a trauma-informed approach to its reviews and investigations while putting survivors first; adequately report and investigate allegations of child sexual abuse; enforce restrictions on accused and offending priests; and provide greater transparency to the complainant and the community about what was known and what was done to respond to allegations of abuse.

I strongly urge the dioceses and the broader Church to take these recommendations seriously and implement greater, meaningful changes to strengthen child protection and improve responses to allegations of abuse.

As a woman of deep faith, it is my prayer and profound hope that this report honors the courage and stories of survivors, acknowledges the action of all stakeholders who previously came forward to address these heartbreaking accounts of abuse, and serves as a renewed catalyst for Massachusetts to finally do all that is necessary to ensure the safety of our children. No institution should ever put its own reputation and interest above the safety and wellbeing of its constituents, especially children.

With tremendous gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'A. G.' or similar, written in a cursive style.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Attorney General Andrea Joy Campbell thanks the following individuals for their assistance with the investigation and report:

The courageous survivors of child sexual abuse by Roman Catholic clerics and religious brothers and nuns who shared their experiences with the Office of the Massachusetts Attorney General.

Governor Maura Healey for initiating, during her tenure as Attorney General, this Office's investigation into child sexual abuse by Catholic clergy in the Dioceses of Fall River, Springfield, and Worcester.

Former attorneys and staff who assisted in the investigation while working at the Office of the Massachusetts Attorney General. We extend our heartfelt gratitude to the many former attorneys and staff who contributed to this investigation during their time in this Office. Their dedication and commitment to this important work helped make this report possible.

Experts and advocacy groups central to the investigation and/or report:

Bishop Accountability

Voice of the Faithful

Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests (SNAP)

Child USA

David Finkelhor, Professor, Director, Crimes Against Children, University of New Hampshire

Dr. Robert Hoatson, President and Co-Founder, Road to Recovery

R. Michael Cassidy
Advisor

Current members of the Office of the Massachusetts Attorney General who made contributions to the investigation and report:

Abigail Taylor
First Assistant Attorney General

Rontear Pendleton
Deputy Attorney General

Jamie Hoag
Senior Counselor to the Attorney General

Paula McManus
Chief Operating Officer

Jennifer Cotter
Chief, Criminal Bureau

Dean Mazzone
Senior Trial Counsel, Criminal Bureau

Chris Kelly
Chief, Digital Evidence Lab

Brenna Casey
Digital Evidence Lab

Current members of the Office of the Massachusetts Attorney General Investigation Team:

Attorneys:

Helle Sachse
Special Assistant Attorney General

Mindy Klenoff
Managing Attorney, White Collar & Public Integrity Division

Lizabeth Lagarto Marshall
Regional Chief, Southeastern Massachusetts Office

Stephanie Jimenez
Special Assistant Attorney General

Stacey Pichardo
Deputy Chief, Criminal Bureau

Kathryn Sherman
Managing Attorney - Chief of District Courts, Gaming Enforcement Division

Investigators:

Sallyann Nelligan
Director, Financial Investigations Division

Matthew Stone
Lieutenant, Massachusetts State Police

Julio Barbosa
Trooper, Massachusetts State Police

Victim Witness Advocates:

Anne Kelley McCarthy
Chief, Victim Services Division

Edith Ayuso
Deputy Chief, Victim Services Division

Lia Panetta
Victim Witness Advocate

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	4
II. INTRODUCTION	6
A. Background and Mandate of the Investigation	6
B. Method of Investigation	7
C. Legal Framework.....	11
i. Reckless Endangerment of a Child.....	11
ii. Mandatory Reporting of Child Abuse	12
iii. Additional Criminal Statutes	12
iv. Limitations on Criminal Prosecution	14
D. Findings	15
III. DIOCESES: DEMOGRAPHICS AND LEADERSHIP STRUCTURE.....	18
A. Diocese of Fall River	18
B. Diocese of Springfield	19
C. Diocese of Worcester.....	21
IV. SCOPE OF THE MISCONDUCT	22
V. PRE-2002 DIOCESAN RESPONSE TO ALLEGATIONS OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE.....	22
A. Pre-2002 Findings: Factors that Perpetuated Abuse.....	23
i. Culture of Reverence and Indulgence toward Priests, and Hostility toward Victims	23
ii. Use of Psychiatric Treatment Facilities to Evaluate Priests	30
iii. Failure to Respond to Allegations of Abuse	35
iv. Concealment of Abuse: Silence and Upholding the Reputation of the Diocese	38
v. Offending Priests Acting in Concert	46
vi. Placing Offender Priests Back in Service	48
vii. Nondisclosure Agreements	49
viii. Failure to Notify Law Enforcement	50
ix. Dioceses Disclaim Responsibility or Authority to Address Religious Order Priests’ Sexual Abuse of Children	51
x. Flawed Diocesan Procedures for Response to Abuse.....	52
VI. 2002 DEVELOPMENTS, NATIONAL AND STATEWIDE	60
A. Dallas Charter.....	61
B. Essential Norms.....	62
VII. POST-2002 DIOCESAN RESPONSE TO ALLEGATIONS OF SEXUAL ABUSE.....	64
A. Current Policies and Practices in the Fall River Diocese	64
i. Office of Safe Environment	65
ii. Codes of Conduct	66
iii. Criminal Record Checks	67
iv. Review Board.....	67

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

v. Investigations Into Allegations of Abuse.....	68
vi. Recordkeeping.....	69
vii. Annual Audits	70
viii. Compliance with Mandatory Reporting Laws	70
ix. Credibly Accused List.....	70
B. Current Policies and Practices in the Springfield Diocese	71
i. Office of Safe Environment	72
ii. Victim Assistance Coordinator	73
iii. Codes of Conduct	73
iv. Criminal Records Checks	74
v. Review Board	74
vi. Investigations into Allegations of Abuse.....	76
vii. Recordkeeping.....	77
viii. Annual Audits	77
ix. Compliance with Mandatory Reporting Laws.....	78
x. Credibly Accused List.....	78
C. Current Policies and Practices in the Worcester Diocese.....	78
i. Office of Healing and Prevention	79
ii. Victim Assistance Coordinator	80
iii. Codes of Conduct	81
iv. Criminal Record Checks.....	82
v. Review Board	82
vi. Investigations into Allegations of Abuse.....	84
vii. Recordkeeping.....	86
viii. Annual Audits	87
ix. Compliance with Mandatory Reporting Laws.....	87
x. Credibly Accused List.....	87
VIII. SURVIVORS' EXPERIENCES	88
IX. CRITICISMS OF POST-2002 DIOCESAN RESPONSE TO ALLEGATIONS OF SEXUAL ABUSE	92
A. Efforts to Circumvent the Policies and Procedures that Protect Children	92
i. Permitting Accused Priests to Retire or Resign Rather than Investigating and Adjudicating Sexual Abuse Complaints.....	94
ii. Failure to Timely Adjudicate Sexual Abuse Complaints.....	98
iii. Failure to Consult Review Boards on Assessments of Sexual Abuse Complaints...	100
B. Failure to Adequately Monitor Priests Accused of Child Sexual Abuse.....	104
C. Failure to Adequately Address Violations of Restrictions on Ministry	109
D. Continued Lack of Transparency and Accountability	113
E. Religious Order Priests Continue to Fall Through the Cracks	115
F. Lack of Authority and Independence of Review Boards.....	118
G. Lack of Clear and Consistent Standards for Credibility Determinations	122
H. Insufficient Education and Training of Review Board Members and Lack of Victim Support.....	124
I. Conflicts of Interest.....	128

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

J. Failure to Identify Grooming Behavior and Other Conduct Falling Short of Child Sexual Abuse	132
K. Failure to Act on Anonymous or Third-Party Allegations	134
L. Failure to Consistently Document Investigations into Child Abuse.....	135
M. Failure to Protect and Encourage Whistleblowers	138
N. Annual Audits are Self-Policing	140
X. RECOMMENDATIONS	142
A. Lists of Credibly Accused Priests	142
B. Supervision of Credibly Accused Priests	143
C. Thorough and Timely Investigation of All Allegations with Documentation of the Process	144
D. Ensuring Professionalism of Investigative and Adjudicatory Processes.....	145
E. Transparency and Oversight Regarding Religious Order Priests	147
F. Memoranda of Understanding with Law Enforcement.....	148
G. Stronger Whistleblower Protections for Reporters of Sexual Abuse	148
H. Victim Support	149
I. Community Education and Transparency.....	151
J. Update and Follow Policies	151
K. Affirmative Release from Confidentiality Provisions	153
XI. APPENDICES	154
Appendix 1: Statements from Survivors	155
Appendix 2: Resource Organizations	185
Appendix 3: The House of Affirmation in the Worcester Diocese	188
Appendix 4: Glossary of Terms	191

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2019, the Attorney General's Office began an intensive investigation into how the Roman Catholic Dioceses of Fall River, Springfield, and Worcester handled child sexual abuse allegations against clergy. The investigation was intended to identify and prosecute crimes relating to clergy sexual abuse within the dioceses. The Attorney General's Office cannot indict or prosecute the crimes it found because of statutes of limitations and other legal constraints. However, the investigation provided this office with an unprecedented view into the institutional failures in all three dioceses that for decades enabled the sexual abuse of children, and we have prepared this report to promote transparency and accountability, to remedy systemic injustice, and to ensure the protection of children.

Over the course of the investigation, the Attorney General's Office reviewed more than 300,000 pages of documents, including every available personnel file of accused priests, and interviewed more than 100 individuals, including diocesan officials and employees, as well as many survivors of childhood clergy sexual abuse who bravely came forward to share their stories. The dioceses cooperated with this investigation by providing records in response to grand jury subpoenas, and by answering questions and making personnel available for interviews outside of the grand jury. No substantive testimony was taken before the grand jury.

For more than half a century, and under the leadership of multiple successive bishops, clergy working within the Dioceses of Fall River, Springfield, and Worcester engaged in the sexual abuse of children. Our investigation revealed more than 900 documented survivors of sexual abuse at the hands of priests and other church personnel across the three dioceses, though the true scope of abuse may be even more extensive, considering that many abuse survivors never come forward or do so many years after the abuse. The evidence gathered during this investigation also shows that, for decades, and especially before 2002, church officials in all three dioceses knew about the sexual abuse of children yet did not take effective action to prevent it or to examine the institutional failures of leadership that led to scores of children being victimized at the hands of abusive priests.

The majority of known abuse—and the misconduct by church officials that concealed and enabled it—occurred before 2002, when public exposure and media coverage of the clergy child

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

sexual abuse crisis led to the implementation of legislative reforms, as well as reforms within the Catholic Church. The misconduct newly identified by this investigation occurred outside the statute of limitations for criminal prosecution, and before Massachusetts legal reforms in 2002 that criminalized reckless endangerment of children and made priests and other clergy mandated reporters of child abuse. Consequently, our office is unable to seek criminal charges. Nonetheless, it is essential to report our findings to the public and create a record of what occurred so that it does not occur again. This report provides a comprehensive account of the Fall River, Springfield, and Worcester Dioceses' responses—or lack thereof—to credible child sexual abuse allegations over the last 70 years. It also identifies the dioceses' current practices for preventing child sexual abuse and how they respond to allegations of abuse.

Since 2002 and, in some cases, more recently, all three dioceses have implemented certain institutional reforms that have significantly improved their response to and reporting of abuse. In particular, in 2019, the Springfield Diocese convened a task force to assess its policies and procedures, and in 2020, the Fall River Diocese undertook an overhaul of its process for responding to allegations of clergy sexual abuse, including an examination of prior allegations against its priests, resulting in a wave of new suspensions. However, our investigation also identified certain failures that persist in areas essential to child protection, including training, investigation of allegations, supervision, and recordkeeping. For example, we found instances since 2002 in each diocese where priests were permitted to remain in ministry for years after the dioceses received reports that the priests had sexually abused children. Even when the dioceses suspended the ministry of accused priests, forbidding them from publicly acting as priests, the men generally remained largely unsupervised, and the suspensions, in many cases, occurred without parishioners or even fellow priests having any knowledge of the nature of a suspended priest's alleged offenses.

This report makes a series of recommendations, based on best practices in sexual violence prevention, to address the dioceses' responses to allegations of child sexual abuse, including: increased supervision over credibly accused priests, additional support for victims, fairer and more consistent procedures to determine the credibility of accusations, and, in the case of the Worcester Diocese, the publication of a list of credibly accused clergy.

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

It is our hope that this report will reveal the truth about these crimes against children, spur further change, and result in a stronger commitment to a safer environment within these dioceses. Still, we know this will never be enough. We note our gratitude for the survivors of clergy sexual abuse who came forward with their stories. We hope this report will encourage others to do the same.

II. INTRODUCTION

A. Background and Mandate of the Investigation

Nearly twenty-five years ago, Boston became the epicenter of the clergy child sexual abuse scandal in the Catholic Church when the *Boston Globe* issued its groundbreaking report on the cover-up of decades of child sexual abuse in the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Boston.¹ The 2002 *Globe* Spotlight series exposed the systemic and widespread problem of clergy sexual abuse in the Archdiocese and how the Church hierarchy's long history of self-protection and secrecy enabled abusers to stay within the Catholic Church and continue to abuse children.

The resulting scrutiny drew a response from the Catholic Church in the form of a national abuse policy announced during the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops ("USCCB") annual meeting in Dallas, Texas. In June 2002, the USCCB promulgated the "*Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*," commonly referred to as the "*Dallas Charter*," which set forth new procedures for addressing allegations of child sexual abuse by Catholic clergy.² The *Dallas Charter* directed all U.S. dioceses to establish lay-majority Review Boards.³

The Massachusetts Legislature responded as well, passing a series of reforms in 2002. The Legislature extended the statute of limitations for many sex crimes against children.⁴ It also

¹ Michael Rezendes, Matt Carroll & Sacha Pfeiffer, *Church Allowed Abuse by Priest for Years*, *Boston Globe* (Jan. 6, 2002), <https://www.bostonglobe.com/news/special-reports/2002/01/06/church-allowed-abuse-priest-for-years/cSHfGkTlrAT25qKGvBuDNM/story.html>.

² U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People ("Dallas Charter")* and *Essential Norms for Diocesan/Eparchial Policies Dealing with Allegations of Sexual Abuse of Minors by Priests or Deacons ("Essential Norms")* <https://www.usccb.org/resources/2026.07%20Charter-rev%20-%20for%20web.pdf> (rev. ed. 2026).

³ Review Boards were designed to serve as advisory bodies for bishops in evaluating allegations of child sexual allegations and to evaluate priests' suitability for ministry. They are discussed in more detail below in Sections V(A)(10)(b), VII(A)(5), VII(B)(5), and VII(C)(5).

⁴ See 2006 Mass. Acts 303.

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

criminalized the reckless endangerment of children, codified at Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 265, § 13L. Passed in 2002 in direct response to the clergy abuse crisis,⁵ G.L. c. 265, § 13L criminalizes many types of conduct by senior church officials that enabled the abuse to continue. However, the constitutional bar on *ex post facto* laws meant that conduct that occurred prior to the 2002 passage of the law could not be criminally charged. Notably, in 2002, the Legislature also expanded the definition of mandated reporters—individuals who are required by law to report incidents of child abuse and neglect to the Department of Children and Families—to include priests and other clergy members, those acting in that capacity, and “any person employed by a church or religious body to supervise, educate, coach, train or counsel a child on a regular basis.”⁶

In 2019, the Office of Attorney General Maura Healey initiated a criminal investigation into the Roman Catholic Dioceses of Fall River, Springfield, and Worcester to determine whether any of the dioceses—or their leadership—bore criminal responsibility arising from their supervisory role over clergy who sexually abused children. The focus of this investigation—the conduct of diocesan managers—differed from the prosecution of individual perpetrators, typically handled by local District Attorneys’ offices. We referred any cases against individual perpetrators potentially within the statute of limitations to the applicable District Attorney’s Office.

The Attorney General’s Office examined diocesan responses to reports of child sexual abuse over the decades to determine whether the dioceses are in compliance with current laws, to assess the safety of children today, and to give a voice to victims of clergy child sexual abuse.

B. Method of Investigation

The Attorney General’s investigation into the institutional responses to allegations of clergy child sexual abuse in the Fall River, Springfield, and Worcester Dioceses was initiated in 2019.⁷ The Attorney General assembled a team consisting of seven Assistant Attorneys General,

⁵ See 2002 Mass. Acts 322.

⁶ See G.L. c. 119, § 21.

⁷ The Attorney General is the chief law enforcement officer of the Commonwealth and has broad statutory authority to institute criminal or civil proceedings “for the public interest” and to investigate matters when she believes there may have been violations of the laws of the Commonwealth. G.L. c. 12, § 10. The Attorney General

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

four State Police officers, two civilian investigators, one eDiscovery Assistant Attorney General, and one victim witness advocate to conduct the investigation. A core team of two Assistant Attorneys General and one State Police officer was assigned to each of the three dioceses.

Grand jury subpoenas were issued to the Dioceses of Fall River, Springfield, and Worcester, compelling, among other things, the production of records and documents relating to allegations of sexual abuse of minors by priests, members of religious orders, and lay employees of the dioceses; personnel records; records of internal investigations conducted by the dioceses; diocesan policies and procedures; other documents relating to sexual abuse of minors; Review Board records; and records pertaining to the medical and/or psychological treatment of any person alleged to have committed child sexual abuse, with the exception of privileged materials. Later, additional subpoenas were issued to religious orders active in the dioceses and to financial institutions. In addition, several local District Attorney's Offices made their records available to us. The Department of Children and Families also provided relevant records.

In total, the team reviewed over 300,000 pages of documents. We sought and reviewed every available personnel file for priests accused of sexual abuse and serving in the Roman Catholic Dioceses of Fall River, Springfield, and Worcester. In all, we reviewed the files of nearly 300 clergy members, including what are known as the "secret archives."⁸ We also reviewed countless other documents such as police reports, criminal case filings, civil case filings, diocesan policies and procedures, diocesan training materials, and media reports and publications.

We had interview access to all necessary diocesan personnel, including top church officials, Review Board members, and safe environment personnel. We interviewed more than one hundred individuals, including survivors of clergy sexual abuse, members of survivor advocacy groups, clergy, attorneys representing survivors in civil suits, former and current diocesan personnel, canon law experts, and experts on child sexual abuse.

shall also "consult with and advise district attorneys in matters relating to their duties." G.L. c. 12, § 6. The Attorney General is constrained by the rules regarding grand jury proceedings and confidentiality required by law. The information disclosed in this report does not disclose matters occurring before the grand jury.

⁸ The Catholic Church's Code of Canon Law requires every diocese to maintain a secret archive — a locked safe for storage of the most carefully guarded documents, including records concerning sexual abuse allegations. See 1983 Code cc. 486, 487, 489, 491, https://www.vatican.va/archive/cod-iuris-canonici/cic_index_en.html. In our investigation, we have seen references to these secret archives as "confidential" or "special" files.

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

Moreover, we conducted criminal, civil, and canon law research, and research into the Church's current policies and procedures intended to protect children from sexual abuse. In particular, we researched the *Dallas Charter*, which contains a set of "*Essential Norms for Diocesan/Eparchial Policies Dealing with Allegations of Sexual Abuse of Minors by Priests or Deacons*" (the "*Essential Norms*"). The *Essential Norms* are binding on all dioceses in the United States and form the basis for the mandatory child protection policies and procedures the dioceses have created since 2002. We examined whether the actions taken by the three dioceses in response to allegations of clergy child sexual abuse are consistent with their own policies and procedures and compliant with the laws of the state.

Over the course of our investigation, we worked diligently to create as complete a record as possible of the extent of clergy sexual abuse in the Dioceses of Fall River, Springfield, and Worcester. Despite the breadth of our investigation, for many reasons—including delayed disclosure by victims, the desire by victims for privacy or confidentiality, and the failure of the dioceses to keep accurate and organized records over the past 70 years or more—we cannot conclusively determine the full extent of the clergy sexual abuse scandal. For example, we know that the files we reviewed do not record all incidents of clergy child sexual abuse in the dioceses, as they did not reflect certain known instances of reported abuse. It was clear from our file review that, especially before the early 1990s, the Dioceses of Fall River, Springfield, and Worcester, like the Boston Archdiocese, often intentionally did not document child sexual abuse allegations or used coded and euphemistic language to conceal them.

We are aware of accusations that the dioceses purged documentation from priest files. Since 2003, local media has reported that some of the Springfield Diocese's records relating to allegations of child abuse from the tenure of former Bishop Christopher J. Weldon were destroyed, though the Springfield Diocese disputes this allegation. Two witnesses have reported statements by former Bishop Thomas L. Dupre at different times about the destruction of files in Bishop Weldon's possession.⁹ Memoranda in the diocesan files from 1992 and 2003 also refer to the possibility of record destruction. While there are records from the 1950s-1980s time

⁹ One of these statements of Bishop Dupre was allegedly at a Presbyteral Council meeting in 2002. The Diocese maintains that that statement was not confirmed by others present at that meeting.

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

period, most are ministerial records, including those reflecting transfers. By and large, we did not locate documented allegations of misconduct from this time period in the records of the Springfield Diocese. For example, there is a dearth of records related to Richard Lavigne, a priest and convicted sex offender who became the subject of dozens of complaints of child sexual abuse and a suspect in the murder of an altar boy in the 1970s. While it often takes many years for survivors of sexual abuse to come forward, evidence indicates that Springfield diocesan officials received at least 11 allegations of abuse (or potential abuse) before the 1990s against some priests; there are not contemporaneous records confirming receipt of those allegations. The lack of records related to abuse allegations during this period does not square with statements and other records indicating that Bishop Weldon (or someone on his behalf) in fact documented some conversations in a very detailed manner. On the weight of the evidence, therefore, we conclude that the Springfield Diocese's records are not complete.

Similarly, in the Worcester Diocese, the former fiscal affairs director testified under oath in a 2003 deposition that all records pertaining to the House of Affirmation, a diocese-affiliated facility that treated priests and members of religious orders accused of sexual abuse, were destroyed between 1990 and 1997, in accordance with the seven-year retention requirement for treatment records in Massachusetts. Because priests were sent to the House of Affirmation for treatment after the Worcester Diocese learned of sexual abuse allegations against them, it is likely that allegations of sexual abuse were documented in House of Affirmation records.

Although documentation by all three dioceses has improved since 2002, as described in detail in this report, certain poor recordkeeping and file management practices persist. During our investigation, we found that all three dioceses kept paper records about their priests. These records go back decades and may be stored in a multitude of different locations in the dioceses with different individuals granted different levels of access to sensitive materials. We heard evidence that this siloed system left Review Board members unsure of whether they had reviewed all historical sexual abuse allegations against priests. Moreover, any failure by the dioceses to adequately document the work of their Review Boards makes it impossible to assess how the Boards handled all sexual abuse complaints. Certain recordkeeping and retention

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

practices also fall short of publicly available canonical policies.¹⁰ A number of priest personnel files we reviewed contained references to allegations of sexual abuse that were not otherwise reflected in the records provided to us. Additionally, some priests were identified as the subjects of abuse complaints, despite the absence of any corresponding documentation in their personnel files.

We are unable to conclude how or why those priest files became incomplete. But because we know they are incomplete, we also cannot conclude that we saw every church file that, at one time, contained a child sexual abuse allegation. This report, therefore, is not—and cannot be taken as—an exhaustive accounting of every incident of clergy sexual abuse in the dioceses over the last century. It is limited by the incompleteness of the diocesan files we reviewed.

C. Legal Framework

In evaluating whether any of the three dioceses or their managers committed crimes that remained viable for prosecution, the investigative team identified the following criminal laws as potentially applicable to their conduct:

i. Reckless Endangerment of a Child

Passed in direct response to the clergy sexual abuse crisis and effective December 11, 2002, G.L. c. 265, § 13L punishes “whoever wantonly or recklessly engages in conduct that creates a substantial risk of serious bodily injury or sexual abuse to a child or wantonly or recklessly fails to take reasonable steps to alleviate such risk where there is a duty to act....” The penalty for a violation of G.L. c. 265, § 13L is imprisonment in the house of correction for up to 2 ½ years.

In order to violate this statute, the dioceses or their managers must have: (1) created a substantial risk of serious bodily injury or sexual abuse to a child under 18 years of age; and (2) wantonly or recklessly either (i) engaged in conduct that created the substantial risk or (ii) failed to take reasonable steps to alleviate that risk where a duty to act existed. Wanton or reckless conduct is defined under the statute as conscious disregard of a substantial and unjustifiable risk. The risk must be of such a nature and degree that to disregard it would constitute “a gross

¹⁰ See 1983 Code cc. 489, 1719; see also *A Resource for Canonical Processes for the Resolution of Complaints of Clerical Sexual Abuse of Minors*, Task Force of the Chairman of the Bishops’ Committee on Canonical Affairs of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Nov. 2003.

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

deviation from the standard of conduct that a reasonable person would observe in the situation.”¹¹

ii. Mandatory Reporting of Child Abuse

Effective May 3, 2002, Massachusetts’ mandatory reporting statute was amended to include any “priest, rabbi, clergy member, ordained or licensed minister, leader of any church or religious body, accredited Christian Science practitioner, person performing official duties on behalf of a church or religious body that are recognized as the duties of a priest, rabbi, clergy, ordained or licensed minister, leader of any church or religious body, accredited Christian Science practitioner, or person employed by a church or religious body to supervise, educate, coach, train or counsel a child on a regular basis” as mandated reporters.¹² These individuals have the same responsibility as doctors, nurses, therapists, and teachers, among others, who must report the abuse or neglect of any child directly to the Massachusetts Department of Children and Families (DCF).

The expanded reporting law specifically mandates clergy members and other enumerated church leaders to make a report to DCF whenever they have “reasonable cause to believe that a child under the age of eighteen years is suffering physical or emotional injury resulting from abuse inflicted upon him which causes harm or substantial risk of harm to the child’s health or welfare, including sexual abuse.”¹³ The statute requires these reports to be made orally to DCF immediately, and a written report detailing the suspected abuse must be filed within 48 hours of receipt of the complaint.

iii. Additional Criminal Statutes

The investigative team also examined whether the dioceses or their managers bore any liability as accessories, accomplices, or co-conspirators to numerous crimes in Massachusetts relating to the sexual assault of children, or for obstructing justice by intimidating or harassing witnesses or making false or misleading statements in connection with this investigation.

¹¹ G.L. c. 265, §13L.

¹² G.L. c. 119, §§ 21, 51A.

¹³ G.L. c. 119, § 51A(a).

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

a) Accessory Before the Fact to a Felony

Liability for the dioceses or their managers as accessories before the fact requires proof beyond a reasonable doubt that: (1) a cleric or diocese employee committed a felony sex crime against a child; (2) a diocese manager was an accessory to that felony by counseling, hiring, or in some other way arranging for that person to commit the felony; and (3) this diocese manager did so with the same intent that the principal person was required to have to be guilty of the felony.¹⁴

b) Accessory After the Fact to a Felony

Liability for the dioceses or their managers as accessories after the fact requires proof beyond a reasonable doubt that they (1) knew that a particular cleric or diocese employee committed a felony sexual assault against a child and (2) harbored, concealed, maintained, or assisted the perpetrator cleric or employee (3) with the specific intent to help the cleric or employee avoid or escape detention, arrest, trial, or punishment.¹⁵ Mere refusal to cooperate with the police or provide information regarding a criminal investigation does not constitute aid or assistance under this statute.¹⁶

c) Conspiracy

The investigative team also examined whether the dioceses or their managers could be charged with conspiring to violate Massachusetts statutes relating to the sexual assault of children or to obstruct justice. The crime of conspiracy under G.L. c. 274, § 7 requires proof beyond a reasonable doubt that a defendant entered into an agreement with one or more people

¹⁴ The elements of the crime of being an accessory before the fact to a felony are set out in G.L. c. 274, § 4, which provides: "Whoever aids in the commission of a felony, or is accessory thereto before the fact by counselling, hiring or otherwise procuring such felony to be committed shall be punished in the manner provided for the punishment of the principal felon."

¹⁵ The elements of the crime of being an accessory after the fact are set out in G.L. c. 274, § 4, which provides: "Whoever, after the commission of a felony, harbors, conceals, maintains or assists the principal felon or accessory before the fact, or gives such offender any other aid, knowing that he has committed a felony or has been accessory thereto before the fact, with intent that he shall avoid or escape detention, arrest, trial or punishment, shall be an accessory after the fact...." See *Commonwealth v. Devlin*, 366 Mass. 132, 135 (1974). Examples of conduct constituting accessory after the fact include aiding felons in fleeing the police, hiding or destroying evidence, and making false statements to the police about either the crime itself or the felon. See *Commonwealth v. Rivera*, 482 Mass. 145, 151 (2019).

¹⁶ See *Rivera*, 482 Mass. at 151.

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

where the objective was criminal or unlawful, or the means of achieving the objective was criminal or unlawful.¹⁷ The crux of the crime is the formation of the unlawful agreement or plan.

d) Witness Intimidation and Misleading an Investigation

Finally, the investigative team examined whether the dioceses or their managers could be charged with obstructing justice by intimidating or harassing witnesses to crimes or misleading police, prosecutors, or grand jurors in connection with this investigation.¹⁸ The statute requires proof beyond a reasonable doubt that a person (a) knowingly made a false statement or (b) intentionally omitted information from a statement thereby causing a portion of such statement to be misleading, or (c) intentionally concealed a material fact, thereby creating a false impression by such statement.¹⁹ To establish a statutory violation, there must also be proof of a defendant's specific intent to "impede, obstruct, delay, harm, punish, or otherwise interfere [by such misleading conduct] with a criminal investigation."²⁰

iv. Limitations on Criminal Prosecution

The investigative team was mindful at all times of limitations in the government's ability to prosecute certain conduct. Because the constitution prohibits the retroactive application of certain criminal laws, they apply only to acts committed or omissions occurring after the statutes became effective. Therefore, the statutory changes in 2002 that criminalized reckless endangerment of a child and broadened mandatory reporting requirements cannot be used to prosecute individuals for acts committed prior to the enactment of these laws.

We identified other criminal conduct that could not be prosecuted because the applicable statute of limitations had expired. Statutes of limitations are laws that allow the government to commence prosecutions for most crimes only within a specified period of time after the crime was committed. Generally, criminal charges must be brought within six years of the commission

¹⁷ *Commonwealth v. Anselmo*, 33 Mass. App. Ct. 602, 604 (1992).

¹⁸ G.L. c. 268, § 13B provides in relevant part: "[w]hoever . . . directly or indirectly, willfully misleads . . . a judge, juror, grand juror, prosecutor, police officer, federal agent, [or] investigator . . . with the intent to impede, obstruct, delay, harm punish or otherwise interfere thereby with a criminal investigation, grand jury proceeding, trial or other criminal proceeding of any type shall be punished...."

¹⁹ *Id.*

²⁰ See *Commonwealth v. Morse*, 468 Mass. 360, 372 (2014).

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

of a crime.²¹ However, in 1985, the Legislature extended the statute of limitations for some crimes against children, including rape of a child, to ten years. The statute of limitations was amended again in 1987 to provide that for some crimes against children, the limitations period does not begin to run until the child victim turns sixteen or the crime is reported to law enforcement. In 1996, the Legislature again extended the statute of limitations for various crimes against children, including rape of a child, from ten years to fifteen years. Then, in 2006, Massachusetts eliminated the criminal statute of limitations for most child sexual abuse felonies and reckless endangerment; however, any charges filed more than 27 years after the crime must be supported by independent evidence that corroborates the allegation.

Importantly, amendments to criminal statutes of limitations apply only to offenses that were not time barred under the earlier version of the statute as of the effective date of the amendment.²² In other words, if prosecution of the crime was barred by the statute of limitations at the time of the amendment, it remains barred after the amendment. For example, when the limitations period for reckless endangerment of a child was eliminated in 2006, a crime that was committed before 2000 could still not be prosecuted under that statute.

D. Findings

While the evidence gathered over the course of this investigation does not provide a basis for bringing criminal charges, it does demonstrate that, for years, church decision-makers in the Fall River, Springfield, and Worcester Dioceses knew that scores of children were being abused by a substantial number of priests in their dioceses and did not take effective action to stop that abuse. Instead, at the time, the dioceses actively sought to cover up the child sexual abuse to protect the reputation of the Church.

We identified several practices regularly employed by all three dioceses before 2002 that perpetuated abuse, kept the public in the dark, and recklessly endangered children. These

²¹ See G.L. c. 277, § 63.

²² See *Commonwealth v. Barger*, 402 Mass. 589, 592 (1988) (applying a subsequent statute of limitation to an offense that was not already time-barred when the new statute of limitations became effective). Cf. *Commonwealth v. Rocheleau*, 404 Mass. 129 (1989) (holding that a new statute of limitations did not apply where the statute of limitations was extended by an amendment seven months after the indictments were time-barred under the statute of limitations that was effective when the offense occurred).

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

practices, described more fully in Section V of this report, included transferring abusive priests to new dioceses or parishes without warning parishioners in the new location, accepting abusive priests from other dioceses or parishes without notifying parishioners, placing abusive priests in unsupervised parish settings, failing to properly investigate sexual abuse allegations against priests, and failing to notify law enforcement of reports that priests had sexually abused children. As a result of the dioceses' actions and failures to act, additional children were victimized at the hands of abusive priests. Because this conduct occurred before Massachusetts criminalized reckless endangerment of children and made priests and other clergy mandated reporters in 2002, it cannot be prosecuted today.

Our investigation did not identify any instance where priests or diocesan officials failed to report ongoing abuse of a minor to the appropriate civilian authorities after our laws changed in 2002. All three dioceses have amended their policies and procedures to incorporate Massachusetts' mandatory reporting law, requiring not just clergy but *all* diocesan employees to report current allegations of the sexual and physical abuse of minors under the age of 18 to DCF.

Deficiencies in the pre-2002 criminal law preclude the Attorney General's Office from bringing criminal charges against the dioceses and their managers. The evidence indicates, however, that their pre-2002 conduct was intentional, reprehensible, and morally wrong. This report provides a comprehensive review of that evidence concerning the dioceses' historical response to sexual abuse allegations. In all, we reviewed documents indicating that there are more than 900 victims of sexual abuse by priests, bishops, deacons, and nuns across the Dioceses of Fall River, Springfield, and Worcester. The abuse of children in all three dioceses was widespread and due in large part to an institutional failure of church leadership. The accounts detailed in this report are overwhelmingly of abuse occurring before 2002, which is consistent with the known phenomenon of delayed disclosure in cases of child sexual abuse.²³

Since 2002, the Dioceses of Fall River, Springfield, and Worcester have implemented reforms that have significantly improved their response to, and reporting of, abuse. Consistent with the *Dallas Charter*, all three dioceses have established child protection policies, including

²³ See, e.g., Child USA, Delayed Disclosure: A Comprehensive Report on Delayed Disclosure in Cases of Child Sexual Abuse. Insights, Implications, and Pathways Forward (2024) at 1-3, <https://childusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/Delayed-Disclosure-2024.pdf>.

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

safe environment training for clergy and lay persons interacting with children. More lay people and experts have been included in the process for reviewing allegations of sexual abuse. The dioceses also have adopted a more pastoral approach towards victims, many of whom have received significant assistance and compensation in the form of therapy, housing, education, and other benefits. We found that certain diocese staff with whom we interacted were truly committed to providing healing and support for victims of child sexual abuse.

Still, there is more to be done. During this investigation, we identified certain internal and systemic failures that persist today. First, there is no independent oversight of a bishop's day-to-day implementation of church protocols or procedures for responding to abuse allegations. Additionally, the lack of independence and authority of the Review Boards charged with evaluating sexual abuse allegations is a significant impediment to reform and improved protections. We also observed deficiencies in varying degrees across all three dioceses in areas essential to child protection, including training, investigation of allegations, recordkeeping, and auditing. These deficiencies are described in Section IX of this report.

Because of the lack of independent oversight, internal church policies and procedures take on considerable importance—if they are not followed, then the lack of independence becomes all the more problematic. And, since 2002, all three dioceses have—in various ways —acted inconsistently with their own internal procedures on abuse investigations. This investigation found examples of bishops not consulting Review Boards for assessments of sexual abuse complaints, permitting accused priests to retire rather than investigating and disclosing abuse allegations, and failing to refer accused priests to the Vatican. The investigation found numerous priests who committed substantiated acts of sexual abuse but were neither removed from the clerical state (though suspended from public ministry) nor adequately supervised within the Church. They continued—and, in some cases, still continue—to receive retirement, housing, and health benefits from the Church. The investigation found little evidence of the Church notifying the public of these priests' locations or taking effective steps to supervise these priests to ensure they will not pose a danger to additional children. Even when the ministry of such priests had been technically restricted, we discovered documented instances in each diocese of priests violating those restrictions with little, if any, consequence. Based on these observations,

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

we make a series of recommendations later in this report for the dioceses to address the shortcomings in their responses to allegations of child sexual abuse that were identified during the investigation. The dioceses' failure to effectively monitor ministry restrictions coupled with church policy that reflects an unwillingness to formally, permanently, and publicly cut ties with offending priests creates continued risk, at which the recommendations in this report are aimed. We call on the Dioceses of Fall River, Springfield, and Worcester to adopt the recommendations in this report and remedy the flaws in their current abuse detection, reporting, and protection systems so that children do not suffer in the future. We know from our investigation that the church hierarchy in all three dioceses historically failed to protect children from sexual abuse.

Although much of this conduct occurred beyond the reach of then-existing criminal law, civil claims would allow survivors to seek a measure of justice against the Church for covering up and enabling their abuse for decades. Civil liability also can serve as a profound deterrent for undesirable behavior and a motivator for systemic change.²⁴ But, as we heard again and again from survivors, the current state of the law in Massachusetts for civil tort liability as it relates to child sexual abuse claims against the Church makes bringing such actions difficult, if not impossible.

III. DIOCESES: DEMOGRAPHICS AND LEADERSHIP STRUCTURE²⁵

A. Diocese of Fall River

The Diocese of Fall River was created in 1904 and covers the counties of Bristol, Barnstable, Dukes and Nantucket, as well as the towns of Marion, Mattapoisett, and Wareham in Plymouth County. The Fall River Diocese was originally comprised of 44 parishes, serving 130,000 parishioners.

As of 2026, the diocese had 55 active priests, with six others working or studying outside of the diocese, and an additional 67 priests whose status within the diocese was listed as retired,

²⁴ See, e.g., Julie Farber & Sara Munson, *Strengthening the Child Welfare Workforce: Lessons for Litigation*, 4 J. Pub. Child Welfare 132 (2010), <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/epdf/10.1080/15548731003799340?needAccess=true>.

²⁵ The statistics that follow are based on information available via each diocese's website, as accessed September 1, 2026. Unless otherwise indicated, the report's other figures, statistics, and statements regarding the presence or absence of diocesan policies are based on information publicly available as of September 1, 2026.

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

sick, or absent. Another 73 priests from religious orders were active within the diocese. The diocese runs three Catholic high schools and 14 elementary schools, with just over 4,900 students in total. The diocese serves a Catholic population of 240,527.

The Diocese is led by the Most Reverend Edgar M. da Cunha, S.D.V., D.D., the eighth bishop of Fall River. Bishop Da Cunha was installed in 2014 and succeeded Bishop George Coleman.

Bishops of the Fall River Diocese	
Edgar da Cunha	2014-present
George Coleman	2003-2014
Sean O'Malley	1992-2002
Daniel Cronin	1970-1992
James Connolly	1951-1970
James Cassidy	1934-1951
Daniel Feehan	1907-1934
William Stang	1904-1907

The Diocese of Fall River is divided into 5 deaneries: Attleboro, Taunton, New Bedford, Fall River, and Cape Cod and the Islands. Each deanery is led by a priest appointed by the bishop to serve in the role of dean.

B. Diocese of Springfield

The Roman Catholic Diocese of Springfield was founded in 1870. It was incorporated under Massachusetts law by a special act of the legislature in 1898 as a corporation sole known as the "Roman Catholic Bishop of Springfield." The Diocese of Springfield covered the counties of Berkshire, Franklin, Hampden, Hampshire, and Worcester until 1950 when Worcester was made a separate diocese. Presently covering the western counties of Berkshire, Franklin, Hampden, and Hampshire, the diocese is comprised of 79 parishes, six missions, 12 elementary schools and two high schools, two colleges and universities, and a medical center and serves over 199,289 Catholics throughout western Massachusetts. The diocese reports having 184 priests

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

and 68 permanent deacons. The seat of the bishop is at St. Michael's Cathedral in Springfield, with headquarters nearby on Elliot Street.

The Diocese of Springfield is headed by the Most Reverend William D. Byrne, who was installed in 2020 as the tenth bishop of the Springfield Diocese.

Bishops of the Springfield Diocese	
William D. Byrne	2020-present
Mitchell T. Rozanski	2014-2020
Timothy A. McDonnell	2004-2014
Thomas L. Dupre	1995-2004
John A. Marshall	1992-1994
Joseph F. Maguire	1977-1992 *coadjutor Bishop 1976-1977
Christopher J. Weldon	1950-1977
Thomas M. O'Leary	1921-1949
Thomas D. Beaven	1892-1920
Patrick T. O'Reilly	1870-1892

We note that one of the most important facts underlying the history of child sexual abuse in the Springfield Diocese is that two of its bishops, Bishop Dupre and Bishop Weldon, who led the diocese for a combined 36 years, are on its list of credibly accused clergy for raping children. Bishop Dupre was indicted by a grand jury in 2004.²⁶ In addition to serving as bishop, he had significant leadership positions within the diocese, serving as a pastor, working in the Tribunal and Chancery, and serving as vicar general and as auxiliary bishop before becoming bishop in 1995.

²⁶ Prosecutors subsequently determined that they could not continue with the prosecution because the statute of limitations in the matter had expired. *Bishop Indicted for Child Rape*, CBS News (September 28, 2004), <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/bishop-indicted-for-child-rape/>.

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

C. Diocese of Worcester

In 1950, the Worcester Diocese was carved out of the Diocese of Springfield and incorporated as a corporation sole. It spans a geographic area of 1,532 square miles congruent with the area of Worcester County. The bishop's seat is located in the city of Worcester at St. Paul's Cathedral. Initially, the Worcester Diocese comprised 127 parishes. A diocesan weekly newspaper, the Catholic Free Press, began publication on May 4, 1951.

The Worcester Diocese has 85 parishes and 109 active diocesan priests. An additional two diocesan priests are active outside the diocese, while 46 diocesan priests are listed as retired, bringing the total number of diocesan priests to 157. In addition, 60 priests from religious orders are active in the diocese. The Worcester Diocese currently supports 14 seminarians.

There are six Catholic junior and senior high schools and 18 Catholic elementary schools located in the Worcester Diocese, serving about 5,000 students. Schools in the Worcester Diocese include diocesan schools, parish schools, and private Catholic schools. In addition, there are two Catholic colleges and universities in the Worcester Diocese with a total enrollment of about 5,400 students.²⁷ The Diocese of Worcester currently serves a Catholic population of 266,700.

The Diocese of Worcester is headed by the Most Reverend Robert Joseph McManus, S.T.D. Bishop McManus was installed in 2004 as the fifth bishop of the Worcester Diocese.

Bishops of the Worcester Diocese	
Robert J. McManus	2004-present
Daniel P. Reilly	1994-2004
Timothy J. Harrington	1983-1994
Bernard J. Flanagan	1959-1983
John Wright	1950-1959

²⁷ Anna Maria College in Paxton, Massachusetts ceased academic operations at the end of the Spring 2026 semester.

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

The Worcester Diocese is structured into 12 deaneries, headed by a dean who is a priest. Eleven deaneries serve priests in parishes within a distinct geographic area of the diocese, and the twelfth dean is responsible for all retired diocesan priests.

IV. SCOPE OF THE MISCONDUCT

For many reasons, including underreporting by victims and the failure of the dioceses to keep accurate or organized records of abuse complaints, the full magnitude of child sexual abuse by clergy in the Dioceses of Fall River, Springfield, and Worcester cannot be determined. But it was clear from our investigation that, by any accounting, the scope of the problem is immense. This is especially true when considering that even a single instance of abuse is a horrific tragedy for a child and can trigger a cascade of negative effects felt for a lifetime.

Over the course of this investigation, we compiled the numbers of accused clergy and abuse survivors based on a review of records produced by the dioceses as well as other sources obtained during the investigation. These numbers are not filtered by any assessment of credibility and include allegations made against priests who were members of religious orders. Because of the difficulty in counting allegations, we present these numbers not as an exact accounting of sexual abuse in the three dioceses, but to document just how widespread the abuse was.

Diocese	Accused Clergy ²⁸	Survivors
Fall River	92	469
Springfield	93	259
Worcester	90	216
TOTAL	275	944

V. PRE-2002 DIOCESAN RESPONSE TO ALLEGATIONS OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

During the course of our investigation, the team reviewed documents and spoke with witnesses about the diocesan response to child sexual abuse allegations in the Dioceses of Fall River, Springfield, and Worcester over a period of more than six decades. Though in many

²⁸ This includes bishops, priests, religious brothers, deacons, and nuns.

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

respects institutional culture was troublingly consistent during this lengthy period of time, there was significant evolution in how the Church handled these cases, with developments often driven by lawsuits, media coverage, and public outrage. National guidelines for the Church's handling of child sexual abuse allegations significantly changed in 2002, after increased public awareness due to the *Boston Globe's* coverage of the Archdiocese of Boston and criminal charges brought against several Massachusetts priests. We therefore begin with a description of the institutional practices that existed across all three dioceses and perpetuated abuse throughout the pre-2002 time period.

A. Pre-2002 Findings: Factors that Perpetuated Abuse

i. Culture of Reverence and Indulgence toward Priests, and Hostility toward Victims

To understand the response to clergy child sexual abuse before 2002, cultural context—both within the Church and in its parish communities—is important. During this period, and especially in the 1960s and 1970s, Catholic priests enjoyed extremely high levels of trust and respect from families in their communities. Priests were viewed as holy, and their attention or attachment to a particular family was encouraged, as it was often viewed as an honor and even a status symbol. It was not uncommon for Catholic families to welcome the parish priest into their homes or to allow their children to accompany him to the rectory or even on overnight trips. Moreover, families often allowed a trusted priest to join them on family outings and vacations.

This social dynamic allowed offending priests easy access to victims and operated as a powerful deterrent to victims' disclosures of abuse. We spoke with multiple victims who noted intense fear about disclosing abuse to their parents. More than one expressed the belief that, were they to reveal the abuse, their parents were more likely to believe the cleric than their own child. Many waited until their parents died to come forward.

This fear was well-founded. Even when families became aware of priests' abuse of their children, societal forces favored silence. In one particularly telling example, during the 1960s, a New Bedford police officer investigated allegations that a priest in the Fall River Diocese had abused more than a dozen children from a single parish. When the officer met with twelve of the families, the families tried to protect the priest by suppressing the information and avoiding his criminal prosecution. They cited significant reputational harm to their families were they to

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

come forward with allegations. Even after hearing details of the actual acts perpetrated against their children, one mother could not be moved from her sympathy for the priest, asking the officer, “Do you know how lonely the life of a priest is?”²⁹

Even if a parent confronted a priest and his supervisor about their child’s report of abuse, this information often would stay at the parish level and supervising priests would not report it to the bishop or other diocesan officials, allowing the conduct to continue for years. In the case of a notorious abuser in the Worcester Diocese who was later criminally convicted, a victim’s mother learned of allegations of abuse from her young daughter in the late 1970s. She reported the priest to his supervisor in the parish and confronted the abuser herself, telling the priest to leave the young girls in the parish alone. The priest apologized to the mother for his behavior yet proceeded to abuse at least six other girls in the same parish. The senior priest never informed his superiors of the allegations and instead allowed the priest to continue working in the parish, where he had a reputation as an effective fundraiser for a financially vulnerable parish. The diocese later condoned the senior priest’s actions, saying that the information about the abuse was not directed at him as an “agent, employee, or representative of the diocese.” The accused priest was thus allowed to sexually abuse well over 50 girls, some as young as four years old, over the course of sixteen years.

Community regard for clergy was so high during this time that priests expected, and frequently received, special treatment, even from civil authorities. We encountered multiple examples of offending priests caught in inappropriate circumstances who expected not to be prosecuted. In some cases, particularly in the 1960s, priests who were taken into custody were quickly released by authorities without charges after the Church was notified of the situation. Moreover, we received reports from victims that some police departments simply turned a blind eye to allegations of sexual abuse by priests, and the diocese was able to “prevail upon the local papers not to write about it and upon the district attorney’s office not to prosecute.” In Springfield, for example, we heard that, in the early 1970s, a local district attorney declined to

²⁹ Bill Zajac, *Past Still Haunts Accused Priest*, Springfield Republican (Feb. 27, 2005), https://www.bishop-accountability.org/news2005_01_06/2005_02_27_Zajac_PastStill.htm.

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

prosecute a case against a priest and commented to the effect of “where are we going to find twelve people to convict a priest?”

On one occasion in 1963, police found a Fall River Diocese priest in a parked car with a teenage boy. They took the priest into custody and held him in the station until his own pastor arrived. He was never booked. Bishop Connolly suspended the priest’s faculties and sent him home to his parents with an admonishment focused not on the moral wrong of the priest’s actions or on the harm to the child involved, but rather on the potential criminal liability for the priest and potential implications for his career, stating: “For reasons of a most grave nature and the attending scandal, I am bound to notify you, by these presents, that you no longer possess faculties in the Diocese of Fall River. . . . You must certainly appreciate the fact that you are liable to prosecution, under the laws of the state of Massachusetts. Such a thing, should it happen, could only result in your loss of all possibility for priestly ministry.”^{30,31}

Within Church culture, a premium was placed on the ability of priests to engage with youth, including through encouraging interest in priestly vocation among the boys of the parish. Former Fall River Diocese priest James Porter, who was ultimately accused of molesting hundreds of children and criminally convicted of abusing more than two dozen during a ministry that spanned less than fifteen years, was a charismatic man and talented athlete, who boasted that he had once been a Golden Gloves boxer. Priests like Porter, who were charming and related well with children, were often assigned additional duties involving activities like scouting, religious education, or youth groups, which gave them increased and sometimes unfettered access to children.

When the priests assigned to these roles were offenders, the increased access proved catastrophic. A review of the priests deemed credibly accused by the dioceses reflects a roster of men assigned to Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, Catholic Youth Organization (CYO) sports, and altar service duties. Multiple seminarians who were later deemed credibly accused of child sexual

³⁰ Kevin O’Connor, *Sins of Omission*, Rutland Herald (May 18, 2008, updated Oct. 17, 2018), https://www.rutlandherald.com/news/sins-of-omission/article_6e4d6036-b878-5c91-8e55-a3836e1745d9.html.

³¹ Within a year, the priest was serving Mass in Western Massachusetts parishes near his parents’ home and, within fifteen months, was incardinated into the Diocese of Fort Wayne. He moved within parishes in that diocese and in the Diocese of Burlington, Vermont until his permanent removal from ministry nearly a decade and a half later, leaving in his wake an untold number of victims.

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

abuse staffed the Fall River Diocese's Catholic youth summer camps in the 1970s, which drew children from as far away as Canada. The effect during that time was a traumatizing and lawless environment, with counselors staring at campers in the showers, taking selected campers for secluded skinny-dipping trips, and perpetrating a variety of inappropriate touching. One victim reported sleeping in the camp's barn to avoid his abuser.

Even when diocesan hierarchy was aware of predatory priests in their ranks, they often did not mitigate the risk posed to the public. In 1993, Ronald Provost, a popular priest in the Worcester Diocese who used federal grant money to run a street hockey league for children, was convicted of one count of posing a child in the nude for taking semi-nude photographs of a boy in a pool locker room. A lifeguard at the swimming pool called the police, and a detective of the Gardner Police Department diligently investigated the case against Provost. During the investigation, Provost gave the police over one hundred photographs of nude and semi-nude boys dating back to the 1970s and admitted that he "would often masturbate while looking at the pictures, saying 'I have had the problem of sexuality for about twenty years . . . I admit that I have a problem and intend on getting help with it.'" The diocese placed the priest on "sick leave" and sent him to St. Luke's Institute in Maryland, one of several treatment centers for pedophile priests. The diocese later paid for years of follow-up treatment. Provost's conduct was foreseeable. In 1993, a former parishioner published an article in *The New Yorker Magazine*, outlining the myriad ways in which the Worcester Diocese could have acted on the warning signs and its actual knowledge of Provost's pedophile tendencies that dated back to his early days as a priest.³² Indeed, Bishop Timothy Harrington's assertion that he "had had no idea of Father Provost's problem" is contradicted by the fact that, thirteen years earlier, Provost had admitted to then-auxiliary Bishop Harrington that he had taken nude photographs of boys. The Worcester Diocese, under Bishop Bernard Flanagan, made no record of that in Provost's personnel file, but Provost himself later said that, as a result, he was sent to the House of Affirmation in Whitinsville, a treatment center for priests located in the Worcester Diocese, for "sexual addiction." In 1996, in trial testimony in a civil case, Bishop Harrington rejected Provost's version of events and said

³² Paul Wilkes, *Unholy Acts*, *The New Yorker* (June 7, 1993), <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1993/06/07/unholy-acts>.

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

he suggested Provost go to the House of Affirmation for “career counseling” and suggested that it “broadened his ministry.”

When offending priests gained access to a wide variety of youth, we note that they often targeted victims in particular kinds of families, a tactic seemingly employed to minimize the risk of detection. Frequently, victims were members of large families with many children or who struggled financially. Victims’ families also often had a father who was absent, violent, or impaired by substance use. Sometimes, the child victim was targeted for reasons that made him or her particularly vulnerable: difficulties in school, a sick relative at home, substance use issues, or their own illness. Attention lavished on such a child by a priest—a male authority figure—gave rise to a strong emotional bond of trust on the child’s part. Many victims described being singled out by priests to take on odd jobs at the rectory, to serve at weddings and funeral services, or to assist before or after Mass. They often expressed pride or a sense of privilege in performing the job or in being selected for it. Mothers who believed their families were lucky to receive attention from a priest would do everything possible to support and foster these connections. We spoke with one victim in a family of more than ten children who recalled how his widowed mother would invite the parish priests into her home to pray over the children, and who took in his abuser’s vestments to iron for extra money to support the family.

Within the unique structure of the church hierarchy, priests were—and are—viewed not as employees to be professionally supervised, but as family to be cared for, guided, and protected. In the context of child sexual abuse, church officials were thus inclined to give priests compassion, second chances, and the benefit of the doubt. The offense was often considered a “moral fault” to be reformed by fraternal correction, rebuke, and pastoral care. Sympathy for the priest as an individual frequently translated to minimization of his harmful actions. Serious offenses were often characterized as merely impairments of social skills, trouble with boundaries, or lapses in judgment. When discussing offenders, the language used by church officials was that of sympathy and excuse for the priest’s personal problems, such as loneliness, depression, stress and overwork, immaturity, or inexperience.³³ Again and again, priests were returned to ministry

³³ See A.W.R. Sipe and Thomas P. Doyle, *Code Words in Reference to Catholic Clergy Sexual Abuse* (Feb. 15, 2009, revised and expanded May 28, 2019), <http://www.awrsipe.com/Doyle/2019/2019-05-28-Coded-Language.pdf>.

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

after complaints of sexual abuse of minors, with an exhortation to avail themselves of the support of other priests for sharing pastoral concerns and socialization. These sympathetic or minimizing characterizations of abuse were frequently contrasted with a clinical diagnosis of pedophilia. Psychological evaluations that ruled out a pedophilia diagnosis for a priest (based largely on the priest's own denials of offending) were used as a basis to disbelieve victims and to fail to take action against the priest.

The decision to frame sexual abuse as loneliness or a boundary violation, and to portray the offending priest as a victim of circumstance, created a narrative where the priest was the victim, struggling with the isolation caused by his role as a cleric. One survivor with whom we spoke described hearing a pastor speak from the pulpit about his abuser, James Porter, encouraging the parish to have sympathy for a man so clearly sick. This sympathy for priests too often stood in contrast to indifference and even hostility toward survivors, who were portrayed inaccurately as the parties with power and agency.

Child abuse was often described by the Church using the language of adult romance, including such euphemisms as “misplaced affection,” “questionable relationships,” or “sentimental attachment.” Priests’ sexual misconduct with young girls was characterized as “boundary violations” and the young girls were treated as adult women and willing participants in romantic relationships with priests.³⁴ These same narrative tropes were in play within the dioceses we investigated. One Fall River victim recounted a teacher at her Catholic school joking in front of the class that her abuser would be escorting her to the school dance. Some victims were framed as the promiscuous aggressors in the abuse, blamed as seeking attention due to psychological or emotional disturbances, or undermined because of their own criminal histories. George Rueger, a former auxiliary bishop of Worcester, expressed the opinion in a 2003 deposition that if a priest sexually abused a minor, he was “sinning with the minor, the minor is his accomplice. What the gravity of the minor’s culpability is hard to say.” In one troubling example from the 1990s, in a discussion of the credibility of one male victim, notes show that the Fall River Review Board speculated on his sexual orientation and whether he had a “crush” on the offending priest.

³⁴ *Id.*

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

Even when not portrayed as the pursuer in the offense, victims were often cast as troubled and confused and their reports were not credited. Victims whose pasts included substance use or sexual abuse by others found their complaints against priests dismissed when the dioceses concluded that their testimony was unreliable based on these factors. As troubled backgrounds were often a factor giving rise to a child being targeted for abuse and were also often the legacy left by abuse, victims were thus frequently discredited for factors directly related to their own victimization. As one survivor later noted, the Church had a habit of seeing alcohol and substance use by a victim as a moral shortcoming, and not as the fallout from childhood sexual abuse. In one example, a priest who had overseen an orphanage in Fall River and was accused of abusing several of its residents was interviewed in the aftermath of District Attorney Paul Walsh's 2002 publication of a list of accused priests within the Fall River Diocese. In the article, the priest acknowledged "some foundation" to one of the victim's accusations against him but explained away the allegations of two additional complainants, insisting they were cases of "mistaken identity" and pointing to the complainants' "long history of addictions and therapy."³⁵

The combined effect of the ways in which the dioceses framed abuse and victims' narratives placed an unduly high burden on victims to "prove" a crime which by its nature would rarely have eyewitnesses or forensic evidence. Within the Fall River Diocese, the principle of "*unus testis, nullus testis*"—*one witness is no witness*—seems to have been a guiding principle in weighing allegations against clergy when only a single victim came forward. In the early iterations of Review Boards, the unwillingness of a survivor to identify themselves, to come before the board and re-tell their story, or even to confront their abuser face-to-face would often result in no action being taken by the board.

Priests used the language of "circumstantial evidence" to dismiss abuse clearly described by victims, and Review Board members were left to consider allegations presented to them skeptically as "he said, s/he said," applying varying standards of proof. At times, victim testimony

³⁵ Steve Urban, *Accused Priest Lashes out at District Attorney*, Standard-Times, A1 (Oct. 6, 2002), <https://www.southcoasttoday.com/story/news/2002/10/06/accused-priest-lashes-out-at/50410796007/>; John P. Cronin, *Angry and Reflective, an Accused Priest Speaks Out*, Standard-Times, B1 (Oct. 6, 2002), <https://www.southcoasttoday.com/story/news/2002/10/06/angry-reflective-accused-priest-speaks/50359117007/>.

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

was discredited if not consistent; but, at other times, similar complaints were dismissed as sounding rehearsed or disingenuous. In the 1990s, the Fall River Review Board even apparently used the “beyond a reasonable doubt” standard of proof—the standard applicable in the criminal context—as the threshold that needed to be met in order to find the accusation credible and suspend the priest. These issues were aggravated by poor records that referenced abuse in euphemistic terms, if the abuse was documented at all.

Many of the victims we spoke with believed that they were the only child victimized by a priest, only later to learn that they were not alone. We also learned of multiple instances where priests or members of religious orders abused two or more children from the same family. The siblings did not learn until many years later that they were not the only ones who were abused within the family. Indeed, many were only able to disclose their abuse once they learned they were not alone. The Church’s concealment of accusations, described in more detail below, as well as its dismissal of single allegations, had a compounding effect. Silencing one victim reached beyond that individual case, potentially silencing the multiple victims who continued to believe they were alone in their experiences.

Though our investigation focused on clergy sexual abuse of children, it also revealed that the dioceses have minimized and overlooked sexual assaults against adults (or older teenagers) as well as minors. Certain such assaults occurred within the context of a pastoral counseling relationship between victim and the priest, often during a particularly vulnerable time in the victim’s life. Many of the same institutional factors that created an environment hostile to child victims and friendly to their offenders created a similar environment for adult and older teen victims. Multiple priest offenders who abused children, particularly adolescents, also offended against adults.³⁶

ii. Use of Psychiatric Treatment Facilities to Evaluate Priests

For many years, the Catholic Church relied on a select group of psychiatric treatment facilities to clear priests for service after offending, though such clearance was often given

³⁶ In 2021, the Vatican implemented changes in canon law to criminalize abuse of adults by priests. See Nicole Winfield, *Vatican Law Criminalizes Abuse of Adults by Priests, Laity*, Associated Press (June 1, 2021), <https://apnews.com/article/europe-sexual-abuse-by-clergy-laws-religion-6aa5ce9537419375091fdcf335c74f78>.

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

without factual or evidentiary support for the conclusion. Bishops viewed treatment at a facility as addressing the problem of sexual abuse or, at least, plausible deniability in the event of recidivism, because the facilities provided assurances from physicians that offenders could safely be returned to ministry. In the early 1960s, the remedies included electroconvulsive therapy. Over the ensuing decades, these facilities attempted to address sexual misconduct largely through a combination of therapy, education, and spirituality. The prevailing wisdom regarding these facilities, even as recently as the 1990s, was that, through continuing follow-up care and limitations on ministry, offending priests could be rehabilitated and successfully returned to service.

In practice, the operation of these treatment facilities and their arrangements with various dioceses created another set of problems. Bishops looked to the facilities for information regarding both the veracity of a complaint and whether any restrictions should be imposed on the accused priest when he returned to his diocese. In some instances, psychological records of the priest were relied on to prove or disprove a victim's allegation, without a separate assessment of the victim's credibility. The flow of information from the bishop to the treatment facilities was limited and the facilities' conclusions appeared to be based on nothing more than the priest's own narrative regarding what led to his hospitalization. One such treatment facility, the Institute of Living in Hartford, Connecticut, has alleged that the Catholic Church—including, specifically, the Archdiocese of Boston—concealed "necessary and pertinent information related to prior sexual misconduct," limiting its ability to appropriately diagnose and treat priest patients.³⁷

In the case of one Springfield priest, who was sent to Southdown in Ontario, Canada in 1991-1992 for abuse of an altar boy beginning when the child was 13, the facility accepted the priest's claims that the sexual acts did not occur until the victim was 17 or 18 because there were no legal charges. Later, the facility told the diocese that the victim's true age would not affect its assessment because he would have been beyond puberty either way, and that, in any event, their recommendations were based on the priest's denial.

³⁷ Eric Rich & Elizabeth Hamilton, *Hartford Institute of Living Doctors Say the Church Used them to Keep Abusive Priests on the Job*, Hartford Courant (Mar. 24, 2002), <https://www.courant.com/hc-egan-0324-story.html>.

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

Other times, treatment facilities classified sexual abuse of children as boundary issues, and recommended priests undergo additional training on boundaries and judgment as they pertained to dealing with youth. Complicating matters, priests were permitted to obtain treatment at these facilities without, in some instances, releasing the results of treatment to their dioceses, thus restricting the flow of information back to the bishop and limiting his ability to accurately predict the risk of recidivism. Bishops then returned even repeat offenders to ministry, where they could once again prey on children. Often, priests were sent to psychiatric facilities after a report of abuse and returned to active ministry within the diocese only to reoffend. Some priests returned to such facilities for up to three, four, or even five evaluations, often at different facilities.

For many years, these treatment facilities permitted accused priests to serve Mass and otherwise minister as priests even through the duration of their stay, exposing the community where the facility was located to accused pedophile priests. These ministry privileges appear to have been granted without any notable supervision or restrictions and resulted in many additional victimizations by prolific offenders. While being treated at the Servants of the Paraclete in New Mexico, James Porter celebrated Mass at various parishes on the weekends. Another Fall River Diocese priest, Raymond McCarthy, credibly accused of sexually abusing more than a dozen children, served Mass regularly for a group of 125 Boy Scouts during his inpatient psychiatric treatment at the same facility. Likewise, David Holley from the Worcester Diocese was allowed to minister in several parishes in New Mexico while in treatment with the Servants of the Paraclete. At the time, the Worcester bishop suggested that Holley should agree to seek treatment with the Servants of the Paraclete as the best way to return to ministry because the Paracletes were able to find openings in nearby dioceses for “their guests.”

Part of the treatment process was the facilities’ discernment of the parameters of ministry to which an accused priest might safely return. This process explicitly included a reflection on the potential for scandal to the Church should the priest return to ministry. In one instance, a treatment facility suggested that the priest “face the consequences for his behavior,” which it said at that time was the danger of scandal upon immediate return to ministry and concluded that a three- to five- year period outside of ministry was appropriate. This same facility

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

found that the same priest, who was at the facility for misconduct with a 16-year-old, was not “a predator” or a risk to sexually offend with minors, in part, because he was not defensive about his behavior. We also encountered evidence that the Springfield Diocese worked with a facility to “clarify” recommendations to allow a priest to return to some form of ministry. In Springfield, a priest was sent to the Institute of Living after a child reported that he had abused him and two other boys. The Institute initially reported that while the priest expressed a desire to be celibate, he could “act out” again if dealing with exhaustion or other emotional stress. When the bishop expressed concern about this language, because it could affect the priest’s reassignment, the Institute amended its report. The amended report stated the priest was unlikely to “act out” again because he was committed to remaining celibate.

The idea that restricted ministry—limiting a particular priest to working with the aged, the infirm, or prison or hospital populations, or to managing cemeteries—could prevent future sexual abuse of children was prevalent and, ultimately, incorrect. By the time Fall River priest James Porter was sent to the Servants of the Paraclete in New Mexico for treatment in 1967, he had already failed to respond to any of the prior “cures” offered to him, including electroshock therapy at a private hospital in Wellesley. Each time Porter was returned to ministry after a hospitalization, he quickly re-engaged in past actions, molesting the children of his parish. Porter would later describe the litany of treatment, noting that each time, he “again fell.”³⁸ It was at the recommendation of Paul Shanley, a priest in the Archdiocese of Boston and himself a prolific abuser, that Porter traveled to New Mexico.³⁹ The Servants of the Paraclete wrote to Bishop James Connolly, offering to place Porter “into the hands of competent medical authorities to continue the therapy he stands in need of,” with the goal of curing him, but noted that, “[f]ailing that, we would hope to be given clear outlines of the fields of his safe priestly activity.”⁴⁰ There was no such field; James Porter moved through dioceses across the United States, leaving in his wake victims in Massachusetts, New Mexico, Minnesota, and Texas.

³⁸ Brian Fraga, *Father James Porter’s 1973 Letter to Pope Seeking Laicization*, The Herald (June 25, 2013), https://www.bishop-accountability.org/news2013/05_06/2013_06_25_Fraga_FatherJames.htm.

³⁹ Letter from William Swanson, Superior, Monastery of the Servants of the Paraclete, NM, to Bishop James L. Connolly, Diocese of Fall River (Aug. 24, 1967), <https://www.Bishop-accountability.org/documents/single/paraclete/servants-6816.pdf>.

⁴⁰ *Id.*

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

One of the most problematic treatment facilities used to clear abusive priests for service was the House of Affirmation in the Worcester Diocese. From 1973 to 1989, the House of Affirmation, located in Whitinsville, functioned as a treatment and counseling center for priests and members of religious orders from the Worcester Diocese and across the country, including those suspected of sexual abuse.^{41,42} It was co-founded by Thomas Kane, a Worcester priest who would later be accused of sexual abuse. From its inception, the House of Affirmation was plagued by allegations of sexual malfeasance among its staff and those receiving treatment there. A former employee who left in 1975 later testified in a deposition that Kane had sexual relationships with staff members of the House of Affirmation (including the witness), their spouses, patients, and minors from a nearby parish. A significant number of victims of child sexual abuse in the Worcester Diocese reported abuse by priests who had connections to the House of Affirmation.

These connections took different forms. There were priests from the Worcester Diocese, who were sent to the House of Affirmation after the diocese learned of sexual abuse allegations against them. Other dioceses also sent accused priests to the House of Affirmation for treatment. Once there, the priests were permitted to participate in ministry in local parishes where they continued to sexually abuse children. Some victims reported being sexually abused at the House of Affirmation itself.

For example, in 1978, West Virginia priest Victor Frobias was sent by his bishop to the House of Affirmation for inpatient treatment after at least six children had reported that Frobias abused them at a group home. Records indicate, however, that Frobias was there to be treated for a “diabetic condition.” Within two months, the West Virginia and Worcester bishops adopted the recommendation from the House of Affirmation that Frobias receive outpatient care and that he be assigned to work as a visiting priest at St. Rose of Lima in Northborough. There, over the course of about two years, Frobias reportedly abused over a dozen more children. According to one of his victims, during his tenure in the Worcester Diocese, Frobias participated in a child sex ring based at the House of Affirmation, involving Kane, Worcester priest David Blizzard, and

⁴¹ At one point, the House of Affirmation had additional facilities in Hopedale, Boston, and Natick, as well as in Middletown, CT, Montara, CA, Webster Groves, MO, and Clearwater, FL.

⁴² After 1989, the House of Affirmation continued to exist as a Massachusetts corporation. See Appendix 3.

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

Boston priest John Geoghan. According to the victim, children were passed around among the different priests at the House of Affirmation or driven to locations in Worcester and Boston to be abused. On one occasion in the late 1970s, the mother of a twelve-year-old boy caught Frobas sexually abusing her son in their home. The mother reported the incident to the parish priest, who informed the bishop, and, at the parents' behest, the bishop informed Frobas's bishop in West Virginia. Yet, Frobas was allowed to return to ministry, first in West Virginia and later in Missouri, before he was criminally charged in 1988 and pleaded guilty to sexually abusing two boys in a suburban St. Louis parish in the 1970s and 1980s. Frobas's conduct in the Worcester Diocese did not come to light until 1992, when one of his victims from St. Rose of Lima came forward. This victim's disclosures to the Massachusetts State Police led to Frobas's 1993 indictment by a Worcester grand jury on multiple charges of rape and indecent assault and battery. Frobas died later that year in a St. Louis nursing home before he could stand trial in Massachusetts. Today, Frobas appears on the lists of credibly accused priests issued by the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston, where he was incardinated, and the Archdiocese of St. Louis, where he was accused and criminally convicted.

iii. Failure to Respond to Allegations of Abuse

When faced with allegations of abuse, the Church too often chose to look away from the allegation, rather than address it directly. When red flags arose, inaction was often the first response. Our investigation indicates that countless acts of abuse could have been prevented by further inquiry.

During this period, third-party reports of inappropriate behavior, even those involving eyewitnesses, received no meaningful response from the dioceses, especially where reports were anonymous. In some cases, Church officials ignored reports of concerning behavior by priests who had previously been accused of, or treated for, sexual abuse of minors. In one such case, a lay religious education staff member wrote to the Fall River bishop in the 1980s, describing a previously accused priest's inappropriate behavior and characterizing him as a "time bomb;" yet, Bishop Cronin took no steps to address the priest or to limit his access to children. At times, offenders who were not yet priests, and who were known to have engaged in child sexual abuse, were allowed to be ordained as priests.

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

Parishioners' letters sometimes indicated that a priest's abusive conduct was an open secret in the community. Likewise, some clergy statements demonstrated widespread knowledge of their colleagues' sexual abuse of children. Certain of the Fall River Diocese's prolific offender priests even earned nicknames related to their repeated offenses. James Porter was called "the horn," by schoolchildren who asked each other, "Has the horn tackled you yet?" Raymond McCarthy was known as "dirty Ray." Edward Paquette was called "Father Pockets," because he "always had something in his pocket for them."

Parish priests who worked alongside offenders overlooked signs of abuse, including rumors among altar boys or in the community, boys frequently out late alone with a priest, priests spending extensive time alone with young boys, late at night or in the rectory living quarters; or just the sense that the relationships between certain priests and children were "too tight, too close." Victims believed that other priests or diocesan staff were aware of or even witnessed the abuse, yet they did not intercede. One victim of the Worcester priest Robert Kelley recalled that around 1970-1972, when she was between six and eight years old, she and her friends sang in the choir at Notre Dame in Southbridge. Before rehearsals, the choir director would take a group of girls to see the priest. Kelley would give them lollipops, pull them onto his lap one by one, and fondle their genitals. Afterwards, the choir director would pick them up and bring them to the choir loft for their rehearsal. The victim believed that the choir director knew exactly why Kelley wanted to see the girls each week.

Sometimes, rather than speak out against the priest or further investigate, a priest-colleague or other church staff member would act to save a specific child. By taking a small action such as preventing a child from going to a priest's vacation home or trying to separate the child from an offending priest by changing staffing schedules for altar servers, that particular child could be shielded from abuse. While such a response to known or suspected abuse may have benefited an individual child, it had the effect of allowing the offender to continue to prey on other children within the community. Tragically, we saw that two priests who had acted to save individual children in this fashion were later credibly accused of being abusers themselves.

Even when a priest was willing to report suspected abuse by another priest to the diocesan hierarchy, such disclosure could be futile as the dioceses were slow to act. Priests were

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

sometimes left in their ministerial positions while investigations were ongoing or were returned to their positions shortly after allegations were made. In one example, in 1995, a priest approached the bishop of Fall River and indicated that, though he could not speak to the veracity of the sexual abuse allegations made against his colleague, he believed his colleague to be profoundly troubled, with severe psychological problems. The bishop would later find the allegations against that particular priest were not credible because the two survivors used similar language to describe the abuse. The bishop returned the accused priest to active ministry without restrictions, where, over the next eleven years, five additional victims came forward to accuse him of sexual misconduct. In the Worcester Diocese, in response to a priest's report of allegations against a fellow priest, a senior diocesan official expressed his intent to resolve the matter by taking the accused priest on a fishing trip and talking to him.

Institutionally, the dioceses operated to discourage or stifle reports of troubling behavior from priests about their colleagues. The case of James Porter, who was accused of molesting more than two hundred children during his 14 years as a priest, is illustrative. The Fall River Diocese and select families were aware of Porter's predation on young boys and girls, yet police chiefs in the three communities where James Porter served reportedly had no official record of complaints about him.⁴³ Porter's assignment record reflects frequent transfers and short stints in parish assignments. Many of Porter's victims later stated that it would have been impossible for the other priests working with him in various parishes to remain ignorant about what was afoot. Even when, many years later, a survivor disclosed Porter's abuse to the chancellor of the diocese, he was met with an admonition to "leave it in the hands of the Lord."

Discretion about a colleague's misconduct—even when that misconduct rose to the level of being criminal—appears to have been a *quid pro quo* to ensure harmony in the workplace, if not also reciprocal circumspection. In 1992, one victim publicly alleged that one of the priests who had served with Porter during his tenure at St. Mary's Church in Mansfield had walked in while Porter was raping him, but simply closed the door and walked away. Additional Porter victims came forward with similar experiences, describing at least six occasions when the same

⁴³ Linda Matchan, Don Aucoin, & Stephen Kurkjian, *Anguished Cries Fell on Deaf Ears*, Boston Globe (July 2, 1992), https://archive.boston.com/globe/spotlight/abuse/archives/070292_porter.htm.

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

priest witnessed Porter molesting them, yet did nothing to stop it. Within a year of this information becoming public, then-Bishop Sean O'Malley elevated the witnessing priest to monsignor.⁴⁴ After the monsignor's death, the diocese learned of allegations that he had himself sexually abused children. The priest is presently on Fall River's Credibly Accused list.

iv. Concealment of Abuse: Silence and Upholding the Reputation of the Diocese

Throughout the twentieth century, internal church practice operated to conceal child sexual abuse. In a wide variety of ways, and with devastating results, the Church consistently acted to prevent the discovery of abuse and abusers in its ranks and to avoid scandal or reputational harm to the Church. Even when discussing sexual offending in correspondence, the Church generally avoided naming it, speaking in code by describing the issue as "depression," "stress," "health," alcoholism, or "other reasons" to explain the need to reassign a priest or to place him on sick leave.⁴⁵

a) Transfers Prior to Ordination as Diocesan Priests

For some priests, allegations of sexual abuse of children predated their ordination into the priesthood. We identified several instances from the 1960s through the 1980s where men were transferred between seminaries before being ordained in a Massachusetts diocese that was fully aware that the priest had been accused of such improprieties during his studies. One such man, Thomas Teczar, for example, attended several seminaries and was required to finish his studies privately. Yet, the Worcester bishop was satisfied that Teczar had worked out his problem and ordained him as a Worcester priest in 1967. Teczar went on to become one of the most prolific abusers in the Worcester Diocese and later in Texas, where he was ultimately criminally convicted.

Even more alarming is that some of these men worked in diocesan orphanages during their time in seminary, where word of their alleged improprieties with children reached the bishop's desk but did not result in their removal from ministry. For example, during the mid-

⁴⁴ Linda Matchan, *Alleged Victims of Porter Decry Elevation of Priest*, Boston Globe, 15 (Mar. 15, 1993), <https://www.bishop-accountability.org/ma-bos/FallRiverPriestsManagement.html>.

⁴⁵ This practice of cloaking abuse in other diagnoses, like depression or alcoholism, also appears to have coincided with a pervasive belief that successfully treating the underlying illness would prevent future commission of sexual crimes.

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

1960s, Teczar was fired from his summer job at the Nazareth Home for Boys in Leicester, Massachusetts, after several allegations of sexually inappropriate conduct with boys were made against him. Other priests who worked with Teczar before his ordination explicitly referenced Teczar's "manifested predilection for intimate and rather exclusive companionship with young boys." Similarly, Worcester priest Robert Kelley, who was notorious for abusing young girls, leading to two criminal convictions in Massachusetts, spent a significant amount of time working in orphanages for girls before his ordination, where he was known for his "easy approach with" children. Within a year of his 1968 ordination, Kelley began abusing his first victim at Notre Dame in Southbridge. The girl, eight years old at the time, reported the abuse to Kelley's superior, who told her that she was exaggerating and misinterpreting Kelley's acts of rape and sexual assault. Kelley testified in a deposition that he disclosed his "affinity for young girls" to Boston Cardinal Humberto Medeiros shortly after his ordination, and that disclosure did not result in any restrictions on his ministry.

b) Transfer of Offending Priests

Rather than directly addressing the issue of sexually predatory priests, the dioceses focused instead on mitigating the "scandal" resulting from their crimes by moving the priest. When allegations or complaints from a parent—or even several parents—regarding a particular priest threatened to erupt, the bishops often simply moved the priest from one parish and assigned him to another. The hasty transfers were meant to address "the problem" of sexual misconduct in a particular parish, but instead had the effect of simply suppressing any potential outcry against the Church and provided the priest with a new community, unfamiliar with the details of his past conduct, upon which to prey. Transfers based on sexual abuse often did not come with any restrictions on the offending priest's activities. Some such priests continued to focus on youth work in their new positions, supervising altar boys or scouting troops, or serving in parishes with elementary schools. These transfers also often did not prevent priests from returning to visit their former parishes and parishioners, where they would be welcomed by families ignorant about the true reason for the transfer. Offending priests exploited this ignorance to continue their abuse of children. In one case, after a religious order priest was transferred from the Fall River Diocese to the Caribbean, he was able to convince one of his

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

former Massachusetts altar boys to travel alone to stay with him for a week in his new home, where the priest began abusing him. Institutional action to suppress the “scandal” of sexual abuse shielded the abusers who, victims told us again and again, assured them that no one needed to know. Secrecy served both the individual abuser and the institution at large.

During the 1960s and 1970s, bishops engaged in a veritable shell game with accused priests, often transferring them to a new parish within the same diocese days after receiving notice of an allegation of sexual abuse. Worcester priest Brendan O’Donoghue, for example, was transferred twelve times in his first fifteen years as an ordained priest from 1950-1965 by two bishops with knowledge of the allegations against him. Transfers were treated as fresh starts and opportunities for priests to correct their behavior. Before one of those transfers in 1955, Bishop Wright wrote O’Donoghue a handwritten note saying, “this is a vote of confidence. Don’t let me down.” O’Donoghue testified in a deposition that, before another transfer in 1979, Bishop Flanagan called the parish priest and told him that he had received a complaint that O’Donoghue had engaged in inappropriate sexual conduct with a child. Following several more transfers and additional sexual abuse of children, O’Donoghue spent time at the House of Affirmation but continued in ministry until his retirement in 1993. O’Donoghue died in 2014, while living at the Southgate retirement home for priests in Shrewsbury.

The true reason for these transfers was never announced publicly. We identified an instance where unsuspecting parishioners, left without their parish priest, rallied behind him and wrote heartfelt letters in support to the bishop. The responses they received from the diocese did not attempt to correct their misimpression.

Though the practice of transferring offending priests from parish to parish within the dioceses waned in the 1980s and 1990s, transfers to more distant dioceses continued. Bishops who wanted an offending priest out of their diocese often encouraged the priest to seek employment with dioceses in other parts of the United States, specifically in parts of the country with growing Catholic populations, where the need for priests was greater.

The connection between New England and dioceses in the Southwest is well documented. Particular cases underscore the personal connections that led to an export of New England priests who faced child sexual abuse allegations to be transferred to rural Catholic parishes in

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

Texas and New Mexico. As noted earlier, James Porter from the Fall River Diocese and David Holley from the Worcester Diocese were both sent to the Servants of the Paraclete in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Without adequate supervision, Holley was able to minister in New Mexico and later in several dioceses in Texas, where he was welcomed as a “calculated risk” because of a shortage of priests. There, Holley abused scores of victims before being criminally convicted of sexually abusing eight boys in New Mexico. In 1993, he was sentenced to serve 275 years in prison. Many of Holley’s thirty-plus victims in Massachusetts and in the Southwest sought recourse by filing civil lawsuits against Holley, the Servants of the Paraclete, the various dioceses in Texas and New Mexico, and the Diocese of Worcester. Holley remained incardinated in—officially affiliated with—the Worcester Diocese until his death in prison in 2008. Like Holley, James Porter was sent to the Servants of the Paraclete for treatment and quickly placed into service there as a priest on weekend assignments covering local parishes. From there, Porter moved on to dioceses in Nevada, Texas, and Minnesota, victimizing children in each state.

In the late 1980s, the Worcester Diocese also found a new home for Thomas Teczar. After abusing multiple boys at St. Mary’s in Uxbridge, Teczar was sent to the House of Affirmation for evaluation and treatment from late 1973 to 1975. Thereafter, Bishops Flanagan and Harrington assigned him to four more parishes in the Worcester Diocese, where he sexually abused several more boys. Teczar was not removed from parishes in Worcester until 1984, when the parents of a fifteen-year-old victim demanded that Bishop Harrington remove him from ministry. The Worcester Diocese paid for additional stays at the House of Affirmation⁴⁶ locations in Massachusetts and California, and at another treatment center, before Bishop Harrington finally informed Teczar in 1986 that he would no longer be allowed to serve in any Worcester parishes because the diocese was too “compact” and too much was known about him. Yet, Bishop Harrington supported Teczar’s transfer to Texas, where he found a “benevolent” bishop for Teczar in Joseph P. Delaney, the bishop of Fort Worth, Texas, and a Fall River native. The Worcester Diocese pushed Bishop Delaney to have Teczar “incardinated immediately in the Diocese of Fort Worth.” The attorney for the Worcester Diocese at the time made this

⁴⁶ For additional information about the House of Affirmation, see Appendix 3: The House of Affirmation in the Worcester Diocese.

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

recommendation to Bishop Harrington “in order to lessen the potential for future liability of the Diocese of Worcester and of [Bishop Harrington] personally.” Bishop Delaney emphasized that he was not concerned about Teczar’s “past problem” and said he understood Worcester’s concerns but insisted on the customary three-year waiting period before considering Teczar for adoption into the diocese. Teczar went on to serve in at least four different parishes in West Texas and abused many more victims. It was in Texas that he was criminally convicted for child sexual abuse. This conviction came about because one of Teczar’s Massachusetts victims went to Texas actively looking for possible victims in the parishes where Teczar had served. Some of them were more than twenty-five years younger than the Massachusetts victim, but he was able to convince them to come forward, and the Texas prosecutor was able to build a case. Teczar died in prison in 2015.

Bishops also transferred some offender priests to ministries beyond the borders of the United States after allegations of sexual abuse. In 1973, a Fall River priest complained to the bishop regarding another priest, whom he accused of misconduct ranging from having nude photographs in the CCD (“Confraternity of Christian Doctrine”) children’s religious education area of the parish center to being “too familiar” with a 17-year-old female parishioner. Less than two weeks later, the bishop transferred the priest in question to a new parish. Within four months, he was again transferred, this time to Bolivia as a cleric in the Society of St. James the Apostle, a missionary group comprised of diocesan priests ministering to communities in Central America. Seventeen years later, Bishop Cronin summoned the priest back to Fall River to address the allegations of abuse made by that young female parishioner, but nevertheless allowed him to return to Bolivia and to his ministry, directing him to participate in ongoing therapy and cautioning him to avoid unsupervised access to children. In fact, the diocese did not report the allegation to civil authorities, either in 1973 when it was first raised or in 1994 when the victim met with then-Bishop O’Malley, a decision that Bishop O’Malley defended because the woman was an adult at the time of her report.⁴⁷ As a result, the priest was able to continue his Bolivian ministry until 2002, when he was indicted on one count of indecent assault and battery on a child

⁴⁷ Stephen Kurkjian & Walter V. Robinson, *O’Malley Defends Allowing Priest to Stay in Mission Posting*, Boston Globe (July 2, 2003), A26, https://archive.boston.com/globe/spotlight/abuse/stories4/070203_mission.htm.

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

under age 14 and one count of unnatural and lascivious acts on a child under 16, crimes that were chargeable because his transfer to Bolivia had operated to toll the statute of limitations. In 2005, the priest pleaded guilty and was sentenced to two years of incarceration and ten years of probation.⁴⁸

c) Concealing the Cause of Suspensions and Restrictions from Ministry

When the Church took action to restrict a priest from public ministry, it frequently did so quietly. Our investigation indicates such restrictions were explained by purported retirement, physical illness, or some other benign description, if any at all. The dioceses hid the true reasons for restrictions from the public and concealed abuse by priests for decades.

In the 1990s, in the early days of the Springfield Diocese's Misconduct Commission (the predecessor of the current Review Board), the bishop allowed a priest accused of raping a boy to retire "for health and personal reasons" to a religious order in Canada.⁴⁹ Not until 1993, when a news article reported the disposition of the Misconduct Commission case did the diocese disclose publicly to the parish that the priest had been credibly accused of raping a child. Similarly, in 1994, another Springfield priest was credibly accused of sexually abusing 14-year-old girls. Bishop Dupre allowed him to retire for "personal reasons" and with no disclosure of the true reason, despite the Misconduct Commission's strong recommendation that the parish be told and there be an effort to identify additional victims. The public did not learn of the reason for the priest's removal until a victim filed a lawsuit against the priest after his death. Another Springfield priest was accused of sexual abuse of children in 1993 and placed on administrative leave but was allowed to announce to his parish that his leave was for health reasons.

The Fall River and Worcester Dioceses also placed offending priests on sick leave and other unexplained leaves, including prolific offenders like James Porter, Edward Paquette, David Holley and Robert Kelley. In the Worcester Diocese, seven priests who were later accused of

⁴⁸ *Priest Gets 2 Years in Abuse Case*, Sun Journal (July 16, 2005), <https://www.sunjournal.com/2005/07/16/priest-gets-2-years-abuse-case/>.

⁴⁹ In 1992, in the wake of the conviction of Richard Lavigne, the Springfield Diocese created a Commission on Improper Conduct of Diocesan Personnel. The Commission's charge was to review allegations of clergy misconduct, including sexual abuse allegations.

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

abuse were placed on sick leave in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. The Fall River Diocese employed the euphemism of sick leave for accused priests well into the 1990s.

Because the dioceses made no public announcement of allegations, priests frequently could, and did, create a narrative to suit their own interests. In some instances, priests disseminated letters to brother priests and/or parishes falsely explaining the reason for leaving their positions as exhaustion or ill health; the diocese did not correct these falsities. In one case, after the Department of Social Services upheld a finding that a priest had sexually abused a child, the Chancellor of the Fall River Diocese sent him a letter notifying him that, due to his health and other reasons, he would be retiring with restrictions on his ministry. In another case, a Fall River priest who was the subject of multiple allegations of sexual abuse announced to parishioners that he was leaving to deal with issues related to stress and depression, before departing to a treatment program in 2001. In his letter of departure, the priest asked parishioners to pray for his healing and return to ministry. When the press inquired, the diocese announced that the leave had been granted at the priest's request, with "no set time period." Parishioners were moved to tears with concern for the priest, expressing their love for him and good wishes for his recovery. In the ensuing years, at least two additional allegations of past child sexual abuse were made to the diocese, and the priest was ultimately suspended indefinitely from ministry. No public disclosure of these allegations was made for the twenty years between 2001 and the release of Fall River's 2021 list of credibly accused priests. Instead, the public misimpression lingered that a beloved priest had valiantly struggled with stress and depression, and families were not given reason to exercise any caution around him.

The true basis for priests' leave or reassignment was sometimes such a closely guarded secret that even other priests remained in the dark. We spoke with one priest in the Fall River Diocese who recounted his assignment to a parish where, unbeknownst to him, he took over for a priest who had been removed for sexually abusing children. A few weeks after he began the new assignment, he was approached by two parishioners, who introduced themselves and explained that they were the parents of the prior priest's victim. The priest described the difficult situation of being dropped, unaware, into the midst of a parish in crisis because of clergy abuse.

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

The dioceses' failure to seek laicization—dismissal from the clerical state—of accused priests created a group of priests in limbo: while not actively engaged in ministry, they nevertheless moved through the community as clerics.⁵⁰ Where the cause of a priest's suspension or any restriction on his ministry was concealed, parishioners and fellow priests had no reason to exercise caution. As a result, an offending priest could evade such restrictions on his ministry and access children without difficulty, and, in some cases, abuse additional children. Indeed, offending priests who had "retired" remained a part of the church community in some fashion, participating in ceremonies such as marriages and funerals and spending time in rectories. Unwitting parishioners continued to welcome them into their homes and lives, completely unaware of the true reason for their absence from public ministry. Sometimes, priests, including those from other dioceses, were also permitted to exercise weekend ministry in parishes on Cape Cod, presumably to deal with the seasonal swell in population in that region and the increased demand for priests.

Not only did the concealment of the reasons for restrictions or suspensions allow offending priests to continue involvement in the church, but in some cases, it allowed offenders to move on to other positions with access to children and other vulnerable populations, including as teachers, in hospitals, and in the field of social services. Supervisors and colleagues at the new positions had no way to know about the priest's history, nor any reason to know that they represented a danger to children or others.

Even when priests were theoretically under supervision and instructed to stay away from children, records suggest that these restrictions were not consistently enforced or followed. For example, priests reassigned to a new parish following an allegation of abuse could return to their old parish to visit former altar boys. One prolific Fall River Diocese child abuser, suspended from ministry in the 1990s, was publicly identified as "retired." In 2002, he was notified by letter that his restrictions included not dressing in priestly garb, not being in any place with access to children, and not being present in rectories. Additional complaints of past abuse were made to

⁵⁰ Laicization is the process by which an ordained priest is returned to the lay state and relieved of his obligations to the Church. Priests who have been found by a canonical process to have committed sexual abuse may be laicized, but dioceses may elect not to pursue laicization and instead remove the cleric's faculties, depriving him of the right to act as a priest within the jurisdiction.

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

the Church in the ensuing years. Nonetheless, to the public, the priest's past actions, and his potential present danger, were hidden. Even many fellow priests did not have a full or accurate understanding of the situation. In 2005, this ambiguity allowed the priest to be present in rectories and in a religious education center of the parish when children were present. In some cases, beyond failing to monitor the restricted priests, the Fall River Diocese lost track of their whereabouts entirely.

Cloaking restrictions in secrecy led to increased opportunity for priests to reoffend, and created doubt about the veracity of other complainants, as there was no basis to know their complaints were consistent with a history of abuse by the priest. Parishioners and clergy, unaware of the priest's history of sexual abuse of minors, disbelieved individual victims, casting them as troublemakers or liars, and portraying them as the lone complainant against a particular cleric. Misidentifying the reasons for a priest's retirement likely also disincentivized other victims from coming forward.

v. Offending Priests Acting in Concert

Across all three dioceses, we found allegations against priests who acted in concert and shared victims with each other. These priests, acting together, engaged in sexual abuse of minors in each other's presence or with each other's knowledge.

After acknowledging that it had mishandled a Chicopee man's allegations that former Bishop Christopher Weldon had raped him, the Springfield Diocese commissioned a 2020 report by retired Judge Peter Velis to investigate the allegations. Judge Velis's report describes how the victim recounted being brutally raped and abused by Weldon and two other priests while he was an altar boy at St. Anne Parish in Chicopee in the 1960s. Another example of priests acting in concert can be found in the report of a victim who was abused in the 1970s by seven different priests within the diocese: The abuse began when he was an altar boy, and one priest took him into a bedroom in the rectory and removed his pants. The boy screamed and a second priest, who was nearby and heard the scream, came into the room and removed the child. Later, the second priest and the pastor of the parish told the child that if he did not tell anyone about what the first priest had done, they could promise him that he would never see the first priest again. That was the beginning of a "relationship" between the victim and the second priest that over

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

the years became sexually abusive. The second priest took advantage of the abuse he witnessed the first priest committing, failed to report it to authorities, and instead used it to gain the victim's trust so he could begin abusing the child himself. The second priest got the victim a job at the rectory and through this employment, the victim was made privy to the "rain day" parties of a group of priests. The victim would set up for these parties, which featured food, drink, poker games, closed curtains, locked doors, and young boys. Even after the second priest was transferred to another parish, he continued to visit the victim and take him for weekend visits at his new church.

In the Fall River Diocese, from the 1960s through the mid-1980s, we found evidence that priests shared victims and, in some cases, used knowledge of another priest's abuse to further their own access to, or the silence of, a particular victim. One prolific offender served at a parish in New Bedford with his former pastor and the two ultimately retired together to a home on the Cape. The two priests sexually abused many of the same children, often at the same time. Even when one of the priests was transferred out of the Fall River Diocese, he would be seen frequently near his old parish, loading young boys up and driving them down to the Cape to go out on his boat. Later accounts from victims indicate that these trips were the pretext for the perpetration of sexual abuse. One priest who spoke with us described being invited to a dinner party at the Cape Cod house shared by the two offending priests in the 1970s. In attendance were two or three teenage boys. An additional guest was a third priest who was later included on the Fall River Diocese's Credibly Accused List. The priest we interviewed described being uncomfortable at this dinner, which felt "too tight, too close." He never returned to the Cape house.

We also note that, in the early 1970's, in the Fall River Diocese, at least one victim described confiding in a priest about the abuse he suffered at the hands of another priest, only to have that priest exploit the confidence as a means of securing the child's silence when he too began to abuse him. The cleric made veiled threats to reveal information he learned in the sacrament of Confession if the child disclosed the ongoing abuse.

A victim in the Worcester Diocese, who was abused by a priest who was later criminally convicted, told us he had always wondered why that priest's successor in the parish knew so well how to get through to him and play to the victim's interests, leading to more sexual abuse by the

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

second priest. Years later, the victim discovered that, at the time, the two priests had been guests at the same summer home on Cape Cod.

vi. Placing Offender Priests Back in Service

Sometimes, the diocese responded to reports of sexual abuse of minors by leaving priests in pastoral ministry and placing restrictions on them short of suspension, such as orders to refrain from being alone with children. In practice, these restrictions were mere suggestions, because they were either inadequately monitored or unenforced. In addition, there was ambiguity regarding what conduct was restricted (e.g., whether the priest was barred from working around children or from ever being near children). At times, return to ministry was conditioned on psychiatric evaluation or treatment, which was not always enforced.

Priests who were returned to ministry after a stay at a treatment facility had little if any supervision. And, because of the lack of disclosure described above, parishioners and even fellow clergy remained unaware of the true reason why they had been on a leave of absence. In one 1995 case, during an investigation of two reports of sexual abuse by a Fall River priest against young girls, a church staff member reported seeing the priest put a third victim, a girl younger than ten years old, on his lap while he was in a bathrobe and kiss her on the mouth. The Review Board recommended that the priest be treated for boundaries issues and then restored to duty with no restrictions. In another Fall River case, a child sexual abuse survivor recounted a phone call from his devout mother, in which she told him that their parish priest—his abuser—had suffered “a nervous breakdown” and would have to step back from ministry. In reality, the priest had been ordered to seek psychiatric treatment. He entered an inpatient treatment facility, and, within three years, the bishop restored his faculties and assigned him to a new parish.

In the Worcester Diocese, the practice of reassigning offending priests to parishes within the diocese after an institutional stay ended around 1983, when Timothy Harrington became the bishop of Worcester. Evidence indicates that one of the reasons this change was made was to preserve the reputation of the Church in a “compact” diocese where information of allegations could more easily follow the priests. As the case of Thomas Teczar showed, however, the Worcester Diocese continued to support these priests in finding work outside of Worcester County.

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

In the Springfield Diocese, a priest was put on administrative leave in 1993 after an allegation was received by what was then known as the Misconduct Commission. Because he had retired shortly before the allegation, no announcement was made by the diocese regarding the reason for his leave. The priest was active in his retirement and even served as administrator at a parish in North Adams. Then, he was allowed to return to ministry in 1994 over the objection of the Misconduct Commission. The offending priest was placed into ministry in a different geographic region, without any public announcement in the diocesan newsletter. He served in various parishes without any disclosure to those parishioners about the prior allegations. Despite his move to a different area, the mother of the victim from the Springfield Diocese later saw the offending priest in a parish, retraumatizing her and her son.

vii. Nondisclosure Agreements

The dioceses frequently used nondisclosure agreements to ensure the silence of survivors and protect their institutional reputation. The dioceses required survivors who successfully reached settlements of civil claims to sign documents barring them from disclosing the facts or terms of the settlement or any statements made during its mediation. The agreements were expansive. The nondisclosure form employed by the Diocese of Fall River, for example, prohibited the victim from discussing “the existence or nature of her claims or the fact or amount of this settlement,” including the terms of the release itself. The dioceses regularly employed these agreements until the early 2000s as a condition for any type of civil relief offered to clergy abuse survivors.

When, in 1995, survivor Phil Saviano was negotiating a civil settlement with the Worcester Diocese over abuse he suffered at the hands of his parish priest, David Holley, for a year and a half in the 1960s, the diocese conditioned the financial settlement on Saviano’s signing a nondisclosure agreement. Saviano refused, electing instead to accept a smaller settlement—one that amounted to just \$5,700 after legal fees—in exchange for retaining the right to speak about the abuse. As Saviano later told the *Boston Globe*, “If I had not been dying of AIDS, I would not have had the courage to come forward, but at that point my career was over, I was on my way out physically, my reputation was shot in the eyes of many people, and I didn’t have a lot to lose. This was a final opportunity to effect some change and address this thing that happened to me

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

when I was a kid.”⁵¹ Saviano went on to found a New England chapter of the Survivors Network of Those Abused by Priests (SNAP) and, after a years-long campaign to expose the rampant sexual abuse within the Church, played a critical role in the *Boston Globe’s* Spotlight investigation that ultimately exposed sexual abuse within the Boston Archdiocese.

viii. Failure to Notify Law Enforcement

Our review of the dioceses indicates that their most fundamental failure was the inability to recognize that abuse is more than a moral failing. It is a crime. The refusal to recognize and report sexual abuse as a crime is at the heart of many of the dioceses’ actions—and, indeed, their inactions—and led to a cascade of harm suffered by victims.

The dioceses’ failure to report sexual abuse to law enforcement allowed the transfers of offenders from parish to parish, often without public explanation. This failure meant that some priests, even those with extensive credible allegations against them, were not prosecuted and were not convicted; they were therefore able to pass criminal background checks both within and outside the diocese, and to continue their access to children.

Bishop Timothy Harrington, who led the Worcester Diocese from 1983 to 1994, made no secret of his policy to never report allegations to law enforcement authorities.⁵² Even if he believed the allegations, Harrington refused to report them because he was not legally required to do so at the time and the resulting publicity could harm the Church. Before taking any steps against an accused priest, he required victims to face their abusers. He then made his own credibility determinations based on that interaction and whether accused priests categorically denied the allegations. Harrington’s credibility assessments determined if the priest was removed from ministry and sent for treatment; likewise, Harrington would only offer help to the victim if he determined that the allegations were substantiated. Moreover, Harrington discouraged some people from coming forward with their allegations because the matters are “like a divorce...everybody gets hurt.” Harrington removed priests only “when they admitted

⁵¹ Matt Schudel, *Phil Saviano, Advocate for Survivors of Sexual Abuse by Catholic Priests, Dies at 69*, Washington Post (Nov. 28, 2021), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/obituaries/2021/11/28/phil-saviano-dead/>.

⁵² As noted earlier in this report, Massachusetts mandatory reporting laws were amended in 2002 to include priests and other clergy.

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

their misbehavior, or when their case became public.” Judge Thayer Fremont-Smith recognized the fallacy in this approach when he noted in a 1998 court decision:

one wonders how he could have believed that the normal Catholic could be expected to be more scandalized by the revelation that there are pedophiles in the priesthood, than by the revelation that, allegedly for decades, when pedophiles were exposed, rather than being removed from the active ministry, they were frequently merely reassigned to another parish where they could continue, with impunity, their assaults on other unsuspecting youngsters.⁵³

Even in cases where referral was made to civil authorities, the diocese did not always accurately represent the underlying facts or its plans for the priest following a criminal investigation. In one case, in the late 1990s, a high-level Fall River Diocese official represented to law enforcement officials that the diocese did not expect that a particular priest would be returned to parish ministry after release from inpatient psychiatric treatment. Instead, within eight months, the bishop returned the priest to active ministry, where he remained until 2020, when the diocese removed him during its comprehensive case review.

ix. Dioceses Disclaim Responsibility or Authority to Address Religious Order Priests’ Sexual Abuse of Children

During the period of our investigation, all three dioceses hosted numerous religious order priests, who performed ministry and served in various roles within the dioceses. The relationship between religious orders and the dioceses resulted in ineffective supervision of credibly accused order priests.

The canonical process by which a religious order priest is assigned to a diocese requires the consent of both the order’s superior and the bishop of the diocese. The bishop grants the order priest the “faculties” of the diocese—that is, ecclesiastical authorization to perform certain acts on behalf of the Church within the bishop’s jurisdiction—and retains the authority to revoke the same. Though the distinction between a diocesan priest and a religious order priest was significant in terms of their supervision, and the handling of child sexual abuse allegations against

⁵³ *Gagne v. O’Donoghue et al.*, Worcester 94-1158, Memorandum and Order, Fremont-Smith, J., n. 1 (July 1998), <https://masslawyersweekly.com/fulltext-opinions/1990/01/01/gagne-v-o8217donoghue-et-al/>.

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

them, the distinction typically was not well understood by parishioners and survivors. Religious order priests often served in the same functions as diocesan priests, insofar as they were visible to laypeople.

Our investigation revealed some tensions between bishops and religious orders regarding supervision of religious order priests, including the role of the bishop and the order's superior in the investigation of and discipline related to allegations of sexual abuse. When allegations of abuse were brought forward, the dioceses sometimes disclaimed responsibility for the order priests, despite the dioceses' authority to revoke faculties granted to individual order priests. In other cases, following an allegation of sexual abuse of a minor and a period of probation or suspension of faculties, the religious order ordinary or superior would recommend to the bishop that the cleric's faculties be reinstated. More than once, the bishop complied, reinstating the priest—and restoring his access to children—only to have him offend again. On at least one occasion, an offending priest was dismissed from his religious order by a superior who noted that the offender could continue to minister as a priest if he could find a bishop willing to take him.

The dioceses' practices regarding the investigation and assessment of complaints of sexual abuse against religious order priests also varied widely. In some cases, allegations were reviewed by the diocesan Review Board. In others, the religious orders had responsibility to investigate, assess, and impose any consequence. Lack of clear guidelines for how religious orders and dioceses would handle child sexual abuse allegations against religious order priests led to inconsistent handling of allegations and unreliable supervision of credibly accused priests, as well as confusion and additional burdens for victims, who were often left without necessary information on where or how to make a complaint.

x. Flawed Diocesan Procedures for Response to Abuse

From the 1950s through the 1970s, when the Church responded to allegations of abuse, it did so informally and inconsistently. By the 1980s and 1990s, in the wake of the nationally publicized criminal trials of Catholic priests, including Gilbert Gauthe in Louisiana and James Porter in Fall River, the dioceses began to develop formal policies and procedures to govern the handling of abuse allegations.

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

Ultimately, it was the action of one of James Porter's survivors, who doggedly pursued the truth from the Fall River Diocese, that led to the first major reforms in the diocesan processes for handling allegations of sexual abuse. Frank Fitzpatrick, a private investigator in Rhode Island, was abused by Porter when he was a student at St. Mary's School in North Attleboro in the early 1960s. In 1989, he approached the chancellor of the Fall River Diocese and disclosed the abuse. The chancellor advised Fitzpatrick to "leave it in the hands of the Lord" and did not tell him that Porter had been the subject of similar accusations at each of his parish assignments.

Unable to obtain relief from the diocese, Fitzpatrick relied on his skills as a private investigator and located Porter in Minnesota, where he had landed after numerous psychiatric hospitalizations and a multitude of parish assignments from Massachusetts to New Mexico to Texas and Minnesota. By 1990, Porter was laicized, having received dispensation from his vocation in 1973, following what Fall River Bishop Connolly euphemistically termed "difficulty with boys in various assignments."⁵⁴ He had married and fathered four children. When Fitzpatrick called, Porter answered Fitzpatrick's questions, admitting in a series of calls tape-recorded by Fitzpatrick that he had sexually abused children, though he told Fitzpatrick that he did not recall the victims' names.

Fitzpatrick began reaching out to former classmates, inquiring gently if they remembered James Porter. Classmate after classmate recounted stories of abuse at the hands of the priest. In 1992, Fitzpatrick placed an ad in local newspapers, asking the same question: "Do you remember Father Porter?" He invited those who responded to a gathering; when they arrived, the collection of survivors recounted being surprised to find friends, classmates, and even family members in the assembled group, all of whom had been victimized by Porter. Despite the group of survivors willing to share their stories, Fitzpatrick still encountered resistance. Ultimately Fitzpatrick connected with Attorney Roderick MacLeish, who coordinated the public disclosure of a group of Porter survivors and spurred the Church to action.

⁵⁴ Questionnaire of Ordinary or Chancellor of Petitioner completed by Bishop James Connolly, 53, (May 30, 1973), <https://www.andersonadvocates.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/James-Porter-Laicization-File.pdf>.

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

a) Procedures to Prevent Reassignment of Offending Priests

As of 1993, the reassignment of predatory priests *ought* to have been curbed by the requirement that a superior attest to any transferring priest's suitability for his new assignment; unfortunately, flaws in implementation dulled the effects of this safeguard.

In November 1993, the National College of Catholic Bishops issued its "Guide for Assigning Priests" ("the *Guide*") in an attempt to standardize the assignment of priests and religious brothers from one diocese or religious order to another and between dioceses and religious orders. The document expressly reminded those involved in investigations and personnel issues of the canonical obligation to maintain confidentiality, respect the individual priest's right to privacy and good reputation, and safeguard the common good of the Church. The *Guide* directed bishops and religious superiors to inquire into the history of a candidate for transfer to determine whether there was any "seriously improper behavior," including alcohol and substance use, violations of celibacy, "sexual impropriety," physical abuse, or financial impropriety. They were then to issue a written statement regarding the priest's suitability for the proposed assignment, indicating whether any information discovered in this review should in any manner limit his ministry. The *Guide* also provided that, when there was an allegation of misconduct, the cleric's bishop or religious superior would cooperate with the bishop or superior in whose jurisdiction the priest was serving to fully investigate the claim and to mitigate future harm. Dioceses adopted a document, sometimes called a *celebret* or certificate of suitability, distilling this practice into a single page on which the bishop or religious superior could attest to the suitability of one of his clerics to be granted temporary faculties to practice under the jurisdiction of another bishop or religious superior.

In theory, the requirement that an individual in a supervisory capacity attest to the fitness of a priest he sought to transfer out of his diocese would serve as a safeguard against the shell-game transfer of offending priests from diocese to diocese and in and out of religious orders that occurred during the previous decades. But in practice, such a policy is only effective if the diocese employing it is transparent about its priests' histories. We did not find that to be the case across all three dioceses.

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

During this period, the Worcester Diocese generally did not make use of celebrets or attest to the fitness of any transferring priests in writing. In the case of David Holley, however, the Archdiocese of Denver, who granted Holley faculties in 1987, later indicated that it did so based on verbal confirmation from a diocesan official in Worcester that Holley was a priest in good standing in the diocese. The Worcester Diocese later denied providing this assurance.

In the Fall River Diocese, we saw numerous examples of the diocese issuing letters of suitability attesting to the fitness of credibly accused priests to minister in other dioceses. For example, in 1998, a priest was accused of exposing his genitals to a seven-year-old child. Though the Fall River Diocese assured the Bristol County District Attorney's Office that the priest would not be returned to ministry, within a year, the Diocese had assigned him to active ministry in a New Bedford parish. The Fall River Diocese would go on to issue the priest certificates of suitability for years, affirming that nothing in his background made it inappropriate for him to interact with children, and allowing him to minister outside the diocese.

In 2012, the Springfield Diocese was notified of a complaint that one of its priests had sexually abused a child in the 1980s. Although the diocese opened an investigation, it does not appear that the complaint was ever brought before the Review Board, and the diocese produced no evidence that the investigation was ever completed. Despite these facts, in 2017, the Springfield Diocese issued the accused priest a letter of suitability to participate in an overseas pilgrimage. The priest continued to serve in various capacities within the diocese until his retirement in 2019. It was not until 2020, after the victim's father contacted the diocese to inquire about the status of the complaint that the Springfield Diocese forwarded the case to the District Attorney pursuant to a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU).

Unfortunately, the misuse of the celebret in this case was illustrative of a broader practice. The practice of issuing celebrets to priests with prior allegations of sexual abuse could present even greater danger to the public than the pre-1993 practice of simply moving priests from parish to parish. In implementing a system that was an internal background check for priests, the dioceses held themselves out to the public as taking care to ensure that their employee priests did not pose a threat to parishes where they had been transferred. But our investigation uncovered multiple examples of priests with checkered histories or ongoing

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

investigations who were nevertheless issued clear and unconditional censure under the 1993 standards.

b) Early Review Boards

In the early 1990s, we saw the development of diocesan “Review Boards,” groups of people appointed by the bishop for the stated purpose of assessing child abuse allegations and forming recommendations for action. The Review Boards have been framed by the dioceses as adding both subject-matter expertise and lay voices to the church’s handling of allegations of child sexual abuse, helping to prevent the failures and active concealment of previous decades.

The Springfield Diocese established a Review Board in 1992, which was formally known as the Commission to Investigate Improper Conduct of Diocesan Personnel. It was formed by Bishop Marshall not long after the 1992 indictment and conviction of the notorious priest, Richard Lavigne, who abused scores of children and had been a suspect in the 1972 murder of 13-year-old altar boy Danny Croteau.⁵⁵ The Commission was tasked with investigating complaints of people harmed by the conduct of any priest or other religious or lay person accountable to the diocese. In 1995, under the leadership of Bishop Dupre, the Springfield Diocese also formed a re-entry commission to assist the bishop in cases where a priest accused of sexual misconduct had received treatment and the bishop was attempting to determine whether—and in what capacity—the priest should be placed back into service.

Following the James Porter scandal and the civil settlement it reached with survivors, the Fall River Diocese formed its first Review Board in 1993 under then-Bishop Sean O’Malley. The Review Board, along with new internal diocesan policies for reporting allegations of abuse to civil authorities and barring diagnosed pedophiles from ministering within the diocese, were part of O’Malley’s stated plan to prevent child sexual abuse.⁵⁶ Porter survivors successfully advocated

⁵⁵ In May 2021, the Hampden County District Attorney’s Office announced it was closing its investigation into the murder of Danny Croteau because of the death of Richard Lavigne. It disclosed that, just prior to Lavigne’s death, investigators had been preparing to seek a warrant for his arrest based on newly gathered evidence. See <https://hampdenda.com/hampden-district-attorney-anthony-d-gulluni-formally-closes-investigation-into-the-homicide-of-danny-croteau-citing-new-evidence-against-richard-lavigne/>.

⁵⁶ A major flaw in this plan was its focus on a diagnosis of pedophilia to bar ministry within the diocese, as not all abusers are diagnosed with pedophilia.

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

to include laypeople on the Review Board, and the early Review Board also included a survivor of sexual abuse.⁵⁷

In the Worcester Diocese, Bishop Harrington established the Commission on Policies and Procedures for Allegations of Abuse in June of 1994 to review the diocese's existing policies and procedures and advise the bishop with respect to allegations of abuse. In January 1996, Bishop Daniel Reilly restructured the Commission and renamed it the Pastoral Care Committee. The Committee's stated purpose was to receive and review allegations of sexual misconduct made against clergy, religious officials on diocesan assignment, or any lay person in the employ of the Worcester Diocese.

These boards ostensibly represented a step toward formality, structure, and third-party involvement in the dioceses' responses to child sexual abuse. Formation of a Review Board was a concrete, public action that dioceses could take to demonstrate a willingness to address the issue of child sexual abuse. Nonetheless, the boards had certain fundamental flaws (certain aspects of which persisted into recent years and even today, as we describe later in the report).

Across the three dioceses, the Review Boards were typically made up of some combination of clergy members; respected community members; subject matter experts like judges, psychologists, or social workers; and stakeholders, such as survivors of abuse or the parents of survivors. All board members were chosen by the bishop, giving him significant control over a body whose purpose was to offer an independent perspective on the cases before it.

Moreover, during this period, there was a lack of training in sexual abuse and trauma provided by the dioceses for those who served on the boards. Individual members, like social workers or jurists, may have had exposure to training in their professional lives, but for the most part, individuals serving on the Review Boards received no such training. As a result, some board members lacked the tools and knowledge to critically evaluate the allegations before them and to interact with victims. Trauma generally, and trauma arising from child sexual abuse in particular, can manifest in a number of ways and have a lasting impact on the life of a survivor. Disclosure of clergy sexual abuse may be delayed and the cultural pressure on the survivor to

⁵⁷ Stephen Kurkjian, *Bishop to Aid Porter Accusers*, Boston Globe (Aug. 21, 1992), http://archive.boston.com/globe/spotlight/abuse/archives/082192_porter.htm.

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

conceal such abuse, even into adulthood, is often overwhelming. We spoke with early Review Board members who heard survivors describe having some manner of ongoing connection to their abusers; some had asked their abuser to officiate a marriage or baptize a child, or they remained cordial with their abusers for years, or even decades, after the abuse. One early Review Board member we interviewed described this as “hard to understand,” and information that weighed against the credibility of the allegation. Training in trauma and sexual abuse would have better prepared Review Board members to evaluate the allegations before them. Overall, such training may also have made the Review Board process more accommodating to victims. One survivor who appeared before the early Fall River Review Board described it as resembling “a tribunal,” where he faced a panel including three priests in cleric’s clothes. He described feeling that he bore the burden of proving the truth of his allegations. Though he was not told his presence was mandatory, he recounted feeling pressure to appear and to provide testimony, unsure of whether he could decline the invitation. “The Church,” he noted, “is like your mother: when they call, you answer.”

The boards were also hindered by incomplete information. Though the boards were tasked with investigating allegations and making credibility determinations, the bishop in each diocese controlled the information the boards received. The provision of information from the dioceses was limited, and at times did not include prior allegations of sexual abuse reflected in the dioceses’ personnel and secret files. Review Boards in all three dioceses turned to their priest members to provide “background information” on the accused. As a former lay member of the Fall River Review Board explained to us, the idea was, “these guys socialized with each other, they knew each other.” But the effect was a reliance on the priests serving on Review Boards to report on the conduct and reputations of their colleagues and friends.

We found, also, that the dioceses failed to use the Review Boards. In the Fall River Diocese, for example, there was a significant gap between the number of allegations of sexual abuse received and the number of allegations brought before its Review Board for adjudication. To fully function in its role in assessing sexual assault allegations, advising on the suitability of priests for continued ministry, and reviewing the effectiveness of diocesan sexual assault policies, the Review Board would have to hear and assess each allegation. That did not occur. To the

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

contrary, one former senior staff member from the Fall River Diocese estimated that the board heard less than half of complaints made to the diocese. We found that informal means were used to resolve complaints of clergy sexual abuse without the convocation of Fall River's Review Board, avoiding disclosure of the allegation beyond the bishop's trusted circle of close advisors. Bypassing a structured process resulted in priests having a clean record within the diocese; that inaccurately clean record was then represented to other dioceses through a celebret. The informal resolution process also left Fall River Review Board members completely disconnected from some allegations against priests. One volunteer who served on the Review Board and whose primary role was to conduct the initial outreach to victims who reported clergy abuse, described the moment when a survivor approached her in the community and asked why she had never returned the telephone message he left for her at the diocese. Confused, she told him that she had never received the message. He responded angrily, and she was left with the sinking realization that the diocese was not sharing all complaints of sexual abuse with her.

The Pastoral Care Committee established in the Worcester Diocese in 1996 heard few allegations before 2002. One senior diocesan official on the Pastoral Care Commission could not recall a single meeting during his membership on the Committee between 1995 and 2002. The official attributed this to the absence of allegations received by the diocese in the 1990s, but numerous allegations of clergy sexual abuse in the Worcester Diocese had been made to senior diocesan officials by that time. In December 1992, the Worcester bishop set up a hotline for victims of clergy child sexual abuse. Bishop Harrington later admitted in a deposition that by 1995, he had received some 30 complaints of sexual abuse involving approximately 20 priests during his time as bishop, which spanned eleven years. Bishop Harrington's admission is inconsistent with the scant allegations heard by the Pastoral Care Committee prior to 2002.

In the Springfield Diocese, not all complaints of misconduct were presented for consideration to its Commission to Investigate Improper Conduct of Diocesan Personnel. For instance, in 1993, the parents of one victim came forward to their parish priest with allegations that another priest had sexually abused their son. Based on the allegations, the priest was sent for treatment and made a partial admission to the accusations. Our investigation revealed that while the Commission was informed that a case had been reported to the bishop and treatment

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

had been sought, the Commission was never presented with the facts or circumstances of the case. Instead, the matter was handled internally.

VI. 2002 DEVELOPMENTS, NATIONAL AND STATEWIDE

In early 2002, the *Boston Globe's* Spotlight report on the Boston Archdiocese thrust the clergy child sexual abuse crisis into a national spotlight and exposed systemic and pervasive problems in the Catholic Church. This was not the first time that allegations of abuse by Roman Catholic clergy made the news. In the mid-1980s, Louisiana priest Gilbert Gauthe was criminally charged for molesting and raping altar boys and was the subject of significant media attention.⁵⁸ Locally, Eugene O'Sullivan, a priest in the Archdiocese of Boston, pleaded guilty for having sexual relations with an altar boy in 1984.⁵⁹ In the early 1990s, more criminal cases involving local priests arose: in 1990, Robert Kelley of the Worcester Diocese was sentenced to prison after pleading guilty to charges of child rape and indecent assault and battery on a child in connection with his sexual abuse of a young girl (in 2003, Kelley would be convicted again for similar offenses); in 1991 and 1992, Richard Lavigne of the Springfield Diocese was charged with molesting multiple children, convicted of two counts of indecent assault and battery, and linked to the murder of Danny Croteau;⁶⁰ in 1992 and 1993, James Porter of the Fall River Diocese was charged with and convicted of molesting dozens of children; and in 1994, James Hanlon of the Archdiocese of Boston was convicted of raping two boys.⁶¹

The 2002 Spotlight series revealed that Church officials had known about the widespread abuse for years and engaged in a cover-up that allowed offending priests to remain in ministry and continue to abuse children. Across Massachusetts, prosecutors and others took action

⁵⁸ *Ex-priest Sentenced for Molesting 11*, Boston Globe, 32 (Oct. 15, 1985), bostonglobe.newspapers.com/image/441107598/.

⁵⁹ Paul Langner, *Priest Admits to Sexual Relations with Altar Boy, Agrees to Treatment*, Boston Globe, 74 (Nov. 9, 1984), bostonglobe.newspapers.com/image/437487042/.

⁶⁰ Jack Sullivan, *Catholic Pastor in Shelburne Falls Charged with Assaults on 2 Boys*, Boston Globe, 17 (Oct. 21, 1991), bostonglobe.newspapers.com/image/439663130/; Jack Sullivan, *Priest Reportedly was Suspect in a Slaying*, Boston Globe, 33 (Oct. 22, 1991), bostonglobe.newspapers.com/image/439664837/; Judith Gaines, *Priest Indicted on Molestation Charges*, Boston Globe, 39 (Feb. 20, 1992), bostonglobe.newspapers.com/image/439718025/; Amy Sessler, *Shelburne Falls Priest Pleads Guilty to Assault*, Boston Globe, 17 (June 26, 1992), <https://bostonglobe.newspapers.com/newspage/439846562/>.

⁶¹ *Priest in Mass. Prison for Abusing Altar Boys is Spared a Trial in Vt.*, Boston Globe, 87 (Oct. 9, 1994), bostonglobe.newspapers.com/image/440622396/.

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

against abusive priests. In January 2002, Attorney General Thomas F. Reilly began an investigation into the Archdiocese of Boston's mishandling of sexual abuse allegations, which resulted in a July 2003 written report. In the fall of 2002, Bristol County District Attorney Paul F. Walsh, Jr. released the names of twenty priests of the Fall River Diocese accused of sexual misconduct and announced the indictment of another. During a press conference, Walsh criticized the diocese, including then-Bishop Sean O'Malley, for its failure to turn over information regarding allegations of abuse, a failure that he noted prevented effective prosecution and exoneration. In Worcester, reporter Kathy Shaw of the *Worcester Telegram & Gazette* published dozens of articles about clergy child sexual abuse. Worcester County District Attorney John J. Conte launched an investigation, issued grand jury subpoenas, and published some of his findings in a 2004 report, including that a "total of 86 priests, brothers and sisters of religious orders, and ordained ministers" in the Worcester Diocese had been accused by victims. Moreover, the Massachusetts Legislature responded by adopting a number of legal changes, creating the new crime of reckless endangerment to children, including clergy among mandated reporters of abuse, and making changes to the statutes of limitations.

The Catholic Church also responded in the form of a national abuse policy announced during the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' ("USCCB") meeting in Dallas, Texas.

A. Dallas Charter

In June 2002, the USCCB promulgated *"The Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People,"* (commonly referred to as the *"Dallas Charter"*), which would be revised in 2005, 2011, 2018 and, mostly recently, in June 2026. The *Dallas Charter* set out procedures purporting to promote healing and reconciliation with victims, to guarantee an effective response to allegations of sexual abuse of minors, and to ensure a safe environment for children and young people in the future. Additionally, it sought to provide a means for future accountability by creating a permanent USCCB Committee on the Protection of Children and Young People, the National Review Board, and the Secretariat of Child and Youth Protection. The thrust of the *Charter* was the adoption of a "zero-tolerance" policy for sexual abuse.

The *Charter* mandates that every diocese across the United States establish a written policy regarding sexual abuse of minors, respond promptly to allegations of sexual abuse of a

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

minor, report abuse of a minor to law enforcement, and cooperate with public authorities about reporting cases when the person is no longer a minor. Additionally, the *Charter* requires that each diocese have a Review Board—made up mainly of laypersons not employed by the diocese—to assess allegations and provide advice to the bishop about policies and procedures.⁶² Importantly, when even a single act of sexual abuse by a priest or deacon is admitted or established after an appropriate investigation, whenever it occurred, the *Charter* requires that the offending priest or deacon be permanently removed from ministry and, if warranted, dismissed from the clerical state, a process also known as laicization.⁶³

In 2001, before the implementation of the *Dallas Charter*, Pope John Paul II issued a decree determining that the sexual abuse of a minor (defined as someone under the age of eighteen) constitutes a “grave offense,” jurisdiction over which is reserved to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (“CDF”), a group of senior officials at the Vatican.⁶⁴ The decree provided that whenever the cleric’s supervisor has at least probable knowledge of the commission of sexual abuse of a minor, the supervisor is required to conduct a preliminary investigation and then communicate the results to the CDF, which would advise the supervisor on how to proceed and determine whether to direct a canonical trial to adjudicate the allegations. When the USCCB adopted the *Dallas Charter*, it incorporated Pope John Paul II’s mandate to refer priests to the CDF.

B. Essential Norms

The USCCB also created the “*Essential Norms for the Diocesan/Eparchial Policies Dealing with Allegations of Sexual Abuse of Minors by Priests or Deacons*” (commonly referred to as the “*Essential Norms*”). The *Essential Norms* were initially promulgated in 2002 and updated in 2006. They were intended to complement the universal law of the Church and the *Dallas Charter*. The *Essential Norms* “constitute particular law for the dioceses . . . of the United States with respect to all priests and deacons in the ecclesiastical ministry of the Church in the United States,” and have received recognition from the Holy See, such that they are binding on the members of the

⁶² *Dallas Charter*, Article 2.

⁶³ *Dallas Charter*, Article 5.

⁶⁴ In 2022, the CDF was renamed “Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith.”

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

USCCB.⁶⁵ In contrast, universal law, including the *Code of Canon Law* (“CIC”) (effective November 25, 1983), applies to the entire Roman Catholic Church world-wide.

When a bishop resolves an allegation of child sexual abuse, he must follow both the universal law and the particular law of the Church. The *Essential Norms* require the following:

- Each diocese must have a **written policy** on sexual abuse of minors by priests, deacons, or other church personnel that complies with the Code of Canon law and is filed with the USCCB (Norm 2, emphasis added).
- Each diocese must have a designated **victim assistance coordinator** (Norm 3, emphasis added).
- Each diocese must establish a **Review Board** that functions as an advisory body to the bishop. The board must be composed of at least five members, with the majority being lay persons not in the employ of the diocese (Norms 4 and 5, emphasis added).^{66, 67}
- When an allegation of sexual abuse of a minor by a priest or deacon is received, a **preliminary investigation must be conducted promptly and objectively** (Norm 6, emphasis added).
- If there is sufficient evidence that sexual abuse of a minor occurred, the **CDF must be notified**, and the priest must be **permanently removed from ministry** (1983 Code c.1722 & Norm 6, emphasis added) and may not be transferred to another diocese (Norm 12, emphasis added).
- Each diocese must follow a **zero-tolerance policy**: after a single act of sexual abuse of a minor has been “admitted or established after an appropriate process in accord with canon law, the offending priest or deacon is to be permanently removed from ministry and, if warranted, dismissed from the clerical state” or **laicized** (Norm 8, emphasis added).

⁶⁵ Essential Norms, Note 1.

⁶⁶ The board should include at least one experienced pastor and one person with experience in the “treatment of the sexual abuse of minors.” *Essential Norms*, Norm 5.

⁶⁷ According to Article 2 of the *Dallas Charter*, the Review Board should also regularly review the diocesan policies and procedures on sexual abuse of minors.

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

- Each diocese must **comply with civil reporting laws** and cooperate in investigations conducted by civil authorities; they are to advise victims of their rights to “make a report to public authorities” (Norm 11, emphasis added).

VII. POST-2002 DIOCESAN RESPONSE TO ALLEGATIONS OF SEXUAL ABUSE

The *Dallas Charter* and *Essential Norms* required all U.S. dioceses to take steps to protect children from sexual abuse but left the development of policies to implement the new requirements to the discretion of each individual diocese. The Dioceses of Fall River, Springfield, and Worcester each adopted different sets of child-protection policies and procedures. Each of the three dioceses established an office generally responsible for implementation and enforcement of policies related to the sexual abuse of children. The Fall River Diocese has an Office of Safe Environment; the Springfield Diocese has an Office of Safe Environment and Victim Assistance; and the Worcester Diocese has an Office of Healing and Prevention. The responsibilities and staffing of these offices vary from diocese to diocese. Each diocese also employs someone responsible for leading victim assistance efforts. Each diocese has a Review Board to hear and assess allegations of child sexual abuse and recommend appropriate courses of action. The composition of the Review Boards, how they work, and how they assess credibility vary among the three dioceses. Differences in procedure between dioceses may lead to confusion or inconsistent responses to allegations of clergy sexual abuse.

Below we describe the current policies and procedures in each of the three dioceses for addressing clergy sexual abuse of minors. We found that despite having strong written policies, the dioceses either failed to follow them or had a practice of ad hoc exceptions and informal resolutions.

A. Current Policies and Practices in the Fall River Diocese

The Fall River diocesan response to clergy abuse has evolved over the decades between the James Porter scandal and present. Beginning in 2020 and continuing through 2025, the Fall River Diocese undertook an overhaul of its policies and procedures. The Fall River Diocese

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

describes its current approach to the prevention of sexual abuse as “the Essential Three:” (1) criminal background check; (2) Safe Environment Training; and (3) Code of Conduct.

i. Office of Safe Environment

The Office of Safe Environment handles all background screening for adults who volunteer, work, or minister within the diocese. Additionally, it is the central repository for all allegations of sexual misconduct against clergy, lay staff, and volunteers. The Office of Safe Environment accepts complaints of clergy sexual abuse made in person, in writing, by phone, in email, or via an online portal. Complaints may be made anonymously. Complaints that are made to other diocesan employees and to clergy must be reported to the Office of Safe Environment.

The office employs staff who focus on education, investigation, and background screening. The staff reports to the Director of Safe Environment and Victim Assistance, who in turn reports to the Chancellor of the Diocese.

The Office of Safe Environment provides programming, including video training sessions, centered on prevention, recognition, and report of sexual abuse of minors. Those who minister, work, or volunteer within the diocese must complete the training every three years, recently updated from every six years. Individuals who complete the training are required to sign an acknowledgement, and the diocese maintains a database with completion dates for all religious and laypeople who work, minister, or volunteer within the diocese to ensure compliance with the training.

The Office of Safe Environment also serves as the primary point of contact for complaints of sexual abuse of minors, providing victim support beginning at the initial complaint, including the coordination of psychiatric counseling or pastoral outreach the victim may elect to receive from the diocese. The Fall River Diocese has indicated that this support is available to victims for as long as needed. Individuals can also submit reports of abuse or concerning behavior through an online portal linked from the Office of Safe Environment page. The portal accepts anonymous complaints. The Victim Assistance Coordinator is one of the individuals tasked with the responsibility for reporting allegations of abuse to the relevant civil authorities, including the Department of Children and Families and the appropriate District Attorney’s Offices. The

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

diocese's current Victim Assistance Coordinator is a licensed social worker with experience in children's counseling.

The diocese also uses the "Circle of Grace" curriculum, which is offered to all children enrolled in faith formation and youth ministry, as well as to all attendees in diocesan schools. The age-appropriate program covers topics including "recognizing physical, emotional and spiritual boundaries," as well as steps to take if those boundaries are violated. Parents may opt out of the "Circle of Grace" programming, electing either to cover the materials at home with their children or to refuse the training in its entirety.

ii. Codes of Conduct

The Fall River Diocese maintains codes of conduct for lay and religious employees. The current code of pastoral conduct was last updated in 2025, though it is difficult to find. While the diocese maintains both a "Policies & Procedures" page and a "Policies & Guidelines" page, neither contains a link to the pastoral code of conduct.⁶⁸ Additionally, when investigators searched "code of conduct" via the search bar on the diocese's webpage, the code of pastoral conduct was not among the linked results. Instead, in order to locate this document, a website user must select the "Essential Three" link, which is not otherwise explained, from the Office of Safe Environment page.

The code requires any physical contact with youth to be "appropriate and non-sexual." It also states that physical contact "should be initiated by the minor aside from the occasional high-five, handshake, or similar appropriate gesture." The code provides guidance on what clergy "should" do, including "avoid[ing] any conduct that a reasonable person could misconstrue as improper." Clergy are instructed to "avoid being alone with any unrelated minor," but this rule is subject to a number of broad exceptions, including "for Sacramental Confession, Pastoral Care, Spiritual Direction, or for reasonable, common-sense exceptions, such as emergency situations and circumstances where the interaction is incidental and not extended." The code restricts priests from communicating one-on-one with minors, via text or other electronic messaging or social media services, and requires priests who receive unsolicited messages from minors to

⁶⁸ The "Policies & Guidelines" page does contain a collection of documents, including outdated versions of the lay code of conduct and the Ministerial Review Board policy.

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

contact the child's parent or legal guardian. The code also tasks clergy with monitoring others for inappropriate behavior and documenting and reporting any such concerns or offenses.

Pursuant to the Diocese's Policy for Protecting the Faithful, all diocesan supervisors are responsible for "the overseeing of mandated compliancy of all who are assigned under their supervision."

iii. Criminal Record Checks

In the Fall River Diocese, criminal background checks are conducted every three years for those who work, minister, or volunteer within the diocese.

iv. Review Board

The Fall River Diocese's Review Board, as constituted in the wake of the James Porter scandal, operated in mostly the same way (with many of the same members) until the 2020 reorganization of the diocesan response to clergy sexual abuse. At that time, the Review Board was renamed the Ministerial Review Board. Now, in addition to adjudicating allegations of clergy sexual abuse, the Board also evaluates allegations of ministerial misconduct and advises the bishop on how to address the accused priest. In April 2023, following extensive conversations with the Attorney General's Office regarding diocesan policies for addressing allegations of clergy sexual abuse, the Fall River Diocese implemented additional changes to its Ministerial Review Board policy.

Ministerial Review Board policy requires the board to be composed of no fewer than five members "of outstanding integrity and good judgment," appointed by the bishop; no fewer than five members must be in full communion with the Church. One member must be an experienced priest. At least one lay member is required to have a professional background in either investigation or treatment related to sexual abuse of minors. Board policy notes that other backgrounds, including experience in law, ministry, health care, human resources, or education may also be valuable for its members. Each member is appointed for a five-year term, which may be renewable, though the bishop may also appoint members for shorter terms. The current reconstituted Ministerial Review Board is composed of several individuals with extensive experience in the areas of sexual abuse and trauma, whose professional lives have centered

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

around the fields of social services, mental health, and civil law. Between 2020 and 2023, the Diocese also made a number of additional improvements to the Board's policies and practices, adopting several of the investigative team's preliminary recommendations, including the creation and implementation of a conflict-of-interest policy, and formalizing an annual requirement for its members to engage in continuing education regarding trauma, abuse dynamics, and/or best practices in abuse and misconduct investigations.

The Ministerial Review Board has a detailed process for documenting Review Board decision-making. Members receive written information, including transcripts of third-party interviews with the victim and the accused in advance of the meeting. Recommendations to the bishop are made in writing, with citations to evidence in support of each conclusion reached, and the format is standardized, allowing the reader to better understand the pertinent information and the members' thought processes.

The Ministerial Review Board hears all allegations against clergy involving sexual abuse of a minor, unless such allegations are deemed "manifestly false" by the Core Advisory Group (*see below*). The Board meets in closed Executive Session to deliberate and reach a decision regarding the credibility of the allegation and how the bishop should proceed with the cleric (e.g., requiring a psychiatric evaluation or treatment). The Ministerial Review Board decision does not have to be unanimous, and decisions that are not unanimous are communicated to the bishop, including the split in votes. The bishop's delegate notifies the Ministerial Review Board of the diocese's "final action" in each case.

v. Investigations Into Allegations of Abuse

When the Office of Safe Environment receives a complaint involving past sexual abuse of a minor, but the victim is an adult at the time of the report, the Office of Safe Environment reports it to civil law enforcement via the use of "Form D," a document sent by the diocese to the appropriate District Attorney's Office. The Fall River Diocese has executed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with both the Bristol County District Attorney's Office and the Cape and Islands District Attorney's Office. The MOUs govern referrals by the Diocese to these offices. No MOU is in place with the Plymouth County District Attorney's Office, but it is the Diocese's stated policy to report all allegations of sexual abuse of minors it receives to law enforcement. The

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

Director of Safe Environment notifies the Core Advisory Group, comprised of the Vicar General, General Counsel, Delegate for Investigations, and the Chancellor, and “such other persons as the Bishop may appoint,” and relays facts gathered during the initial contact with the victim. This group then undertakes the initial assessment of whether the allegation is not “manifestly false.”

When the Core Advisory Group determines a complaint is not manifestly false, they will advise the bishop, who may take any of a number of steps, including meeting with the accused, placing him on administrative leave, directing him to stay away from the school, parish, or victim, suspending his faculties, barring him from wearing his clerical clothing, or sending him for psychological evaluation.⁶⁹

Since reconstituting its Ministerial Review Board in 2020, the Fall River Diocese has engaged the services of a qualified private third-party investigation firm.⁷⁰ The diocese provides the firm with documentation from its files, such as assignment cards, though not all documents are automatically made available to the investigators. Sensitive documents—like psychiatric evaluations of accused priests—may be held back and reviewed only by the bishop. The investigators’ report and supporting documentation are then reviewed by diocesan staff and then the bishop himself, who determines whether to convene the Ministerial Review Board to get its advice on how to proceed. When we asked a high-level former diocesan official whether the bishop could terminate an investigation at any point in this process or even decide not to convene the Ministerial Review Board, she confirmed that he could. “That’s the bishop’s choice. They are there for him.”

vi. Recordkeeping

The Fall River Diocese’s 2020 reorganization has included centralization of its records. Personnel and other diocesan records previously were spread across the bishop’s office, the

⁶⁹ Under the language of this policy, the bishop retains sole discretion as to which—if any—of these steps to take. In contrast, the Child Protection Policy for the Archdiocese of Boston provides that, when an allegation of abuse is made against a priest, deacon, or religious, the Archdiocese will, rather than may, take certain steps (e.g., place the accused on administrative leave). Child Protection Policy, Archdiocese of Boston, 22 (revised June 2019), <https://files.ecatholic.com/34017/documents/2023/1/ChildProtectionPolicyforWebsiteRev-June2019.pdf?t=1672860039000>.

⁷⁰ It is noteworthy that the Fall River Diocese’s Policy for Protecting the Faithful, revised in July 2025, indicates only that the bishop “may appoint an investigator to thoroughly collect the facts and identify the circumstances surrounding the allegation.”

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

Chancery, and the archive. These records are now largely organized in a single, central location, and the diocese undertook the process of digitizing its paper files. Personnel records are kept in a locked room, with access limited to the bishop, his secretary, and the bishop's delegate to the Ministerial Review Board.

The Fall River Diocese's records have not always been centralized or standardized. During the course of our investigation, for example, relevant documents were located years after they were requested, in an old safe that had been forced open in order to be repurposed, as its combination code had been lost.

vii. Annual Audits

The Fall River Diocese participates in annual audits conducted by the USCCB to address the implementation of, and compliance with, the requirements of the *Dallas Charter*. We reviewed records related to audits of the Fall River Diocese between 2002 and 2025. Based on this review, it appears that the Fall River Diocese was deemed to be compliant during these audit periods.

viii. Compliance with Mandatory Reporting Laws

When the Fall River Diocese receives a complaint involving sexual abuse of a child, a report must be made immediately pursuant to G.L. c. 119, § 51A. In addition to compliance with mandatory reporting requirements under the law, the diocese requires all staff to alert the Office of Safe Environment of any current allegations involving sexual abuse of a minor, to ensure that it is aware of all allegations involving diocesan personnel or volunteers. Our investigation did not reveal any violations of the 2002 update of the Massachusetts mandatory reporting law by the Fall River Diocese.

ix. Credibly Accused List

In January 2021, the Fall River Diocese first compiled and published the names of clergy who had been incardinated in or ministered within the diocese and credibly or publicly accused of sexual abuse of a minor. The list represents the culmination of an internal examination of diocesan files, for which the diocese engaged multiple third-party consultants. The list is published on the diocese's website and includes priests in three categories: Credibly Accused,

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

Publicly Accused, and Cases in Process. Those on the Credibly Accused List have been the subject of an allegation of sexual abuse of a minor that meets the standard for “semblance of truth,” as defined in canon law, which approximates the legal standard of probable cause. The Publicly Accused list includes the names of clerics who were named publicly in media as having been accused of sexual abuse of a minor, or who appear on lists of accused priests compiled by advocacy groups, other dioceses, or religious orders. The diocese specifies that it lacks information to reach its own independent conclusion regarding the credibility of the accusation. Finally, the Cases in Process list includes only living priests against whom allegations have been made but not yet adjudicated; as of this writing, there are no priests included on this list.

B. Current Policies and Practices in the Springfield Diocese

The Diocese of Springfield established its Policy for the Protection of Children and Youth in 2003 and revised it in 2005, 2008, 2011, 2013 and, most recently, in 2025. Although the policy provides for review every three years, the policy was not reviewed and revised between 2013 and 2025, a twelve-year period. The policy’s stated intent is to “help with the process of healing,” “to create an environment that protects our children from harm,” and to “face the issue of sexual abuse by clergy, staff, and volunteers in an open and straightforward manner.” The policy addresses victim services, abuse prevention and education, reporting responsibilities, guidelines for dealing with complaints, clergy monitoring, screening and selection of clergy, staff, and volunteers, and communication.

Recently, the Diocese has been updating certain of its policies and practices, particularly after publicity related to allegations of sexual abuse against former Bishop Christopher Weldon and two other priests. In July 2019, the Springfield Diocese commissioned an investigation by retired Judge Peter Velis into the allegations after acknowledging it had mishandled the case for years. Judge Velis was also asked to evaluate the current practices in place in the Springfield Diocese for handling abuse allegations and recommend improvements. Judge Velis released a public report on the results of his investigation in June 2020. The report found the allegations of the victim against Bishop Weldon to be “unequivocally credible” and also opined that, “the process as it exists today is lacking and devoid of a cohesive functional operation that would

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

ensure a full and substantive mechanism for fielding complaints.”⁷¹ Ahead of the report, in April 2020, the diocese entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with the three western District Attorney’s Offices relating to the reporting of allegations of sexual abuse.⁷² In May 2020, the Diocese also announced the creation of a task force to review the findings of the Velis report and advise the bishop on specific steps for improvement. The Task Force released a report in September 2021 that contains six strategic initiatives to improve the diocese’s response to allegations of child sexual abuse and to create a safe environment for the future. The initiatives focus on acknowledging the trauma of sexual abuse, promoting healing, responding to allegations in a timely and compassionate way, and ensuring transparency and accountability while creating a safe environment for the future. An Implementation and Oversight Committee (IOC) was formed after the Task Force completed its report to implement the three-year strategic plan developed by the Task Force. Several members of the Task Force carried over their work and now serve on the IOC.

i. Office of Safe Environment

The Springfield Diocese’s Office of Safe Environment and Victim Assistance (OSEVA) is currently staffed by a director, a victim assistance coordinator, a data and training coordinator, and part-time investigators. The former director described a twofold focus of OSEVA: (1) creating a safe environment within the church through background checks and CORI checks of all individuals, lay and clergy, who are in contact with minors and an education program to prevent future abuse and (2) providing a trauma-informed response to victims of sexual misconduct. The educational component consists of the VIRTUS program that was created by the National Catholic Risk Retention Group, Inc., which has been employed in Springfield since at least 2017. VIRTUS is designed to train individuals on how to recognize and report signs and symptoms of child abuse. Clergy, volunteers, and individuals employed by the diocese in any capacity must complete the program when they are hired and then re-certify every three years thereafter.

⁷¹ In May 2023, the Diocese announced a settlement with this survivor and withdrew all public statements the Diocese made in May/June 2019 that were inconsistent with the Diocese’s credibility finding.

⁷² The Springfield Diocese was first approached about entering an MOU in early 2019 by the Attorney General’s Office and the three district attorney’s offices. To date, the diocese has declined to participate in an MOU to which the AGO is a party.

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

ii. Victim Assistance Coordinator

The Victim Assistance Coordinator works under the Director of the Office of Safe Environment and Victim Assistance, as detailed above.

iii. Codes of Conduct

During the course of this investigation, the Diocese of Springfield maintained a three-page Code of Conduct for Church Personnel that was last updated in 2017. The Code had relatively limited provisions specifically addressing the prevention of child sexual abuse.

Subsequently, in 2025, the diocese revised the Code of Conduct that governs the conduct of all who work, volunteer, or minister within the diocese. The updated Code establishes clearer expectations regarding boundaries between adults and minors, prohibits sexualized and inappropriate physical contact, addresses grooming-related behaviors such as favoritism and the granting of special privileges, strengthens restrictions on private electronic communications and social media contact, requires parental involvement in communications with minors, addresses overnight accommodations, and reinforces the obligation of all employees, volunteers, and clergy to report suspected abuse. Importantly, the revised Code also makes clear that the responsibility for maintaining appropriate boundaries rests with the adult, rather than the child, and emphasizes transparency when adults interact with minors.

Despite these improvements, the revised Code lacks consistency and clarity in critical areas that could limit the effectiveness of its protections. While the Code does distinguish between mandatory requirements—what a person “shall” or “must” do—it still uses permissive language like “should” and “whenever feasible,” even when addressing situations posing blatant danger to children. For example, the Code does not impose an unequivocal prohibition on providing alcohol and drugs to minors but instead indicates that diocesan personnel “*should* always refrain” from making alcohol or drugs available to minors. Similarly, the Code states that personnel “*should*” refrain from providing overnight accommodations to minors without the presence of another adult to supervise. The use of discretionary language in circumstances presenting foreseeable risks to children therefore leaves room for inconsistent interpretation and enforcement.

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

The Code is also silent on the procedure for reporting when the alleged abuser is a supervisor within the diocese. Although the Code requires that a supervisor be notified in certain circumstances, it offers no plan of action if that supervisor is the person alleged to have engaged in abusive or inappropriate conduct. A robust child protection policy ought to anticipate this possibility and provide an explicit alternative reporting pathway that does not require an allegation to be reported to the very person who may be implicated in the conduct. Without such a safeguard, the reporting structure could create a conflict of interest and potentially discourage or delay the reporting of concerns.

Lastly, although the Code identifies supervisors as individuals to whom concerns and violations must be reported, it does not impose a distinct or heightened obligation on those in supervisory positions to monitor and ensure compliance of those they supervise. Instead, responsibility for adherence rests primarily with each individual. Notably, the Code expressly assigns supervisors an oversight role in the limited context of monitoring diocesan-sponsored social media sites, but it does not establish a comparable supervisory oversight responsibility elsewhere in the Code. This is a significant gap because supervisors are often best positioned to identify patterns of concerning behavior, recognize boundary violations, and intervene before misconduct escalates, yet the Code does not expressly require them to be vigilant to and accountable for intervention in those circumstances.

iv. Criminal Records Checks

All diocesan personnel employed in any capacity, including clergy and volunteers, who interact with children are required to submit to CORI checks. Pursuant to the diocese's CORI Policy, active clergy, employees, educators, and volunteers are subject to additional CORI checks every three years.

v. Review Board

The Springfield Diocese's Review Board was originally established in 1992, under the title of the Commission to Investigate Improper Conduct of Diocesan Personnel (also referred to as the Misconduct Commission) but was renamed following the adoption of the *Dallas Norms*. It

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

currently operates as a confidential consultative body to advise the bishop in matters related to clergy sexual abuse of minors.

According to the diocese's policy, the Springfield Review Board has nine members, though as of the summer of 2026, only eight appointees were serving on the Board. The Board must include five individuals who are active members of the Catholic Church in good standing, and four additional members who represent the broader community. One member must be a priest in the diocese and one member must be an "expert in the treatment of child sexual abuse." The Review Board reviews investigation reports comprised of information obtained from the victim's intake form and information gathered by the assigned investigator and makes recommendations to diocesan leadership regarding sexual abuse allegations. Under the Policy for the Protection of Children and Youth, the Review Board is also assigned to review and make recommendations regarding the continuation of a cleric in pastoral ministry.

The by-laws of the Review Board, revised in July 2021, establish the purpose of and composition of the Review Board, the powers and duties of its members, and the selection and term of office for the officers. These by-laws establish that the Review Board, based on reports, information, and interviews, determines whether allegations are credible, not credible, or undetermined. The board must meet no less than quarterly and a quorum of at least five members is required for all business matters, other than a finding of credibility which requires a supermajority of seven members. Once a credibility determination is reached by the supermajority, the board must then report the determination to the bishop along with their recommendations for appropriate actions for his consideration.

The Review Board also has a Procedure for Assessing Allegations of Sexual Abuse and Misconduct with vulnerable persons by clergy or other church personnel, revised in late 2020. The Procedure sets out the process followed when allegations of abuse or misconduct are presented to the diocese. First, all allegations are to be reported to the Director of the Office of Safe Environments and Victim Assistance (DOSEVA). If allegations manifest in another way, they are to be forwarded directly and immediately to the DOSEVA. Upon receipt of allegations, the DOSEVA will contact the victim, read to him or her the "Statement Regarding Reporting Sexual Abuse and Misconduct of a Vulnerable Person," and obtain a signed and dated copy of this

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

Statement to be retained in the permanent confidential files regarding the report. Whenever possible, the DOSEVA will then meet with the victim to complete the intake form. If required, the DOSEVA will notify the Department of Children and Families, the Disabled Persons' Protection Commission, or the Executive Office of Elder Affairs within 48 hours. The DOSEVA will notify the Chairperson of the Review Board, the Diocesan Counsel, and the Ordinary of the allegations. Notice is also required to be sent to the local District Attorney. The Diocesan Investigation Team (DIT) will be assigned to the matter and will immediately determine plausibility of the allegation. If the allegation is found to be plausible, the DIT shall commence a thorough investigation and submit a written report to the Review Board. A Review Board meeting may then be held to consider the allegations and make a determination as to credibility (provided that members must be afforded at least ten days to review the written report before any such consideration and determination). The determination shall be reported to the bishop in writing by the Review Board Chairperson, along with any recommendations by the Review Board for disposition of the matter. The DOSEVA will also be provided with a copy of the recommendations and a letter is sent to the accuser and accused setting forth the Review Board's findings.

The bishop will then make a determination as to the appropriate actions to be taken and issues a decree closing the preliminary investigation. The bishop shall inform the DOSEVA of his decision. At the discretion of the bishop, the DOSEVA will inform the accuser and the Review Board of the bishop's decision.

vi. Investigations into Allegations of Abuse

How the Review Board process and civil authorities are to interact is set forth in a Memorandum of Understanding first executed by the Springfield Diocese and the District Attorneys of Berkshire, Hampden, and Northwestern Districts in April of 2020. The MOU was subsequently re-executed in 2024 and remains in effect through June 30, 2027. Pursuant to that MOU, the diocese suspends its investigation for up to 90 days after the allegation is reported to civil authorities. The 90-day window can be extended upon request by the relevant district attorney. After the expiration of 90 days (and any pertinent extension), the diocese may continue with its own investigation, utilizing the Review Board and its investigators to pursue their investigation.

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

Historically, the Springfield Diocese's Review Board utilized a single investigator. However, in 2020, the diocese amended its procedure and now has several investigators who work in two-person teams to conduct an investigation. These investigators have training and experience in investigating sexual assaults and full access to any and all records of the diocese when performing their investigation.

vii. Recordkeeping

In the Diocese of Springfield, the Chancellor is the keeper of records. There are three categories of files maintained by the diocese—regular operations, historical, and confidential. Over the years, these records have been retained in various locations, including the bishop's office and a three-story, fireproof vault in the Chancery that requires the entry of a combination code to open. The historical documents are maintained in the upstairs level of that vault, and the older business records are maintained in the lower level. Allegations of sexual abuse are maintained in a locked safe, or the secret archives. Only a limited number of people in the diocese have access to the vault. Personnel files are also separately maintained and some committees, such as the school board, are considered their own entities, and maintain their own records. The Diocesan Misconduct Commission, which later became the Review Board, also maintains its own files.

viii. Annual Audits

The Springfield Diocese participates in annual audits conducted by the USCCB to address the implementation of and compliance with the requirements of the *Dallas Charter*. The Springfield Diocese produced very little information related to these audits. We have been unable to conclude whether the Diocese of Springfield historically has been determined to be in compliance. The Director of OSEVA advised us that the diocese was deemed in compliance with the audit for the 2019-2020 period. The Springfield Diocese currently publishes on its website an audit covering the period from July 1, 2023, through July 30, 2026, which states that the Diocese is in compliance with the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People. The published audit states that the finding of compliance is based "upon inquiry, observation and the review of

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

specifically requested documentation,” but does not provide further detail regarding the nature or scope of that inquiry, observation, or document review.

ix. Compliance with Mandatory Reporting Laws

Our investigation did not reveal any violations of the 2002 update of the Massachusetts mandatory reporting law by the Springfield Diocese. While we did identify allegations of historical abuse that do not appear to have been promptly communicated to law enforcement, reporting these allegations was not required by law because the relevant statute only requires reporting for abuse involving victims who are minors at the time of the disclosure. After the diocese entered into the MOU with the District Attorney’s Offices, its reporting appears to have improved. A Mandated Reporter Policy and Procedure was signed by Bishop William Byrne and became effective April 1, 2021. This policy expresses the Diocese of Springfield’s commitment to working with civil authorities to protect children and it outlines the procedures to be followed to report suspected abuse of children. This policy applies to any and all diocesan personnel, including those who do not work with or volunteer with children.

x. Credibly Accused List

In 2011, the Springfield Diocese released a list of priests against whom a credible allegation had been lodged while they were still alive. In May 2021, the Springfield Diocese expanded its published list of personnel who have been credibly accused of sexual abuse, including, for the first time, clergy who were deceased when the allegation was made, priests from religious orders who served within the diocese, and lay church staff. In announcing this list, Bishop Byrne recognized that “public acknowledgement of those credible allegations is a critically important action that the diocese owes to those survivors who have so courageously stepped forward.” For purposes of the public list, the diocese has stated that an allegation is deemed credible if there is a “reasonable cause to believe that the sexual abuse occurred” and has equated this to the probable cause threshold required for a grand jury indictment.

C. Current Policies and Practices in the Worcester Diocese

In 2002, in response to the *Dallas Charter* and *Essential Norms*, the Diocese of Worcester adopted its Policies and Procedures for the Protection of Minors. Its policies are designed to

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

address the creation of a safe environment for children, healing and reconciliation of victims and survivors, cooperation with civil authorities, and discipline and accountability for accused priests. The Policies and Procedures for the Protection of Minors were revised in 2005, 2016, and again in June 2024; the Code of Ministerial Conduct was last revised in April 2021. Today, the Worcester Diocese's child protection policies are set forth in a total of 14 pages. The procedures are available on the diocese's website.

i. Office of Healing and Prevention

The Worcester Diocese made several changes to comply with the *Dallas Charter* and *Essential Norms*. The first was to establish the Office of Healing and Prevention. The Director of the Office of Healing and Prevention is primarily responsible for implementing and enforcing the diocese's Policies and Procedures for the Protection of Minors and Code of Conduct certifications, managing the Safe Environment Training Program, overseeing mandatory reporter training, and implementing and overseeing criminal background checks for diocese personnel. The Director also handles other administrative, liaison, and community outreach responsibilities. This position reports to the bishop.

The Office of Healing and Prevention facilitates the provision of Safe Environment Training to all members of the Worcester Diocese who volunteer with children, all clergy, and all employees. As of January 2004, no person is permitted to minister, work, or volunteer in the diocese without having completed these mandated prevention and education programs. These programs are offered online. New employees, clergy members, and volunteers are required to watch an online training video. Current training covers topics such as how to identify a child in need and how to handle and report the sexual abuse of children. Upon completion of online training, electronic confirmation is sent to the Chancellor and the Office of Healing and Prevention. Safe Environment training occurs during the onboarding of a new cleric, employee or volunteer and then every five years thereafter. Training for children is embedded within the CCD curriculum.

In June 2021, the diocese adopted the "Circle of Grace" program as the age-appropriate children's education component of its Safe Environment training. The program teaches minors how to identify and maintain appropriate physical, emotional, spiritual, and sexual boundaries;

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

recognize when boundary violations are about to occur; and react when boundaries are threatened or violated. The program is required training for all minors in diocesan schools and religious education programs in parishes.

Encouragingly, this new curriculum includes broader education on mechanisms for reporting sexual abuse: children are taught to identify trusted adults in whom they can confide if they or someone they know has experienced abuse. Additionally, children receive lessons on grooming and internet safety, which were not offered under prior curricula. The diocese tracks children's compliance with the program and utilizes assessments designed to measure children's understanding of program materials. Safe environment training is offered to parents electronically via an instructional video posted on the diocese's website; parents are also provided with pamphlets about recognizing, identifying, and reporting child abuse.

ii. Victim Assistance Coordinator

In 2002, the Worcester Diocese established a position within the Office of Healing and Prevention called the Victim Assistance Coordinator, whose responsibility is to lead victim assistance efforts. Today, this person receives most of the sexual abuse and sexual misconduct allegations reported to the Worcester Diocese.⁷³ The Victim Assistance Coordinator reports directly to the bishop.

The Victim Assistance Coordinator primarily guides the sexual abuse victim through the process of filing a formal complaint and participates in any personal meetings between the victim and the bishop. The Victim Assistance Coordinator also arranges for the payment of expenses and costs related to therapy and other services for victims. Finally, the Victim Assistance Coordinator is responsible for facilitating the reporting of initial complaints with appropriate agencies, including the Department of Children and Families (DCF) and the diocesan liaison to the Worcester District Attorney's Office.

The current Victim Assistance Coordinator in the Worcester Diocese is a licensed social worker who also has prior experience working with sex offenders. The Victim Assistance

⁷³ Between 2002 and 2005, reports of child sexual abuse of minors were received by the Initial Review Committee, a sub-committee of members of the Diocesan Review Committee whose members were selected by the bishop. The Initial Review Committee was eliminated in 2005 and thereafter reports of child sexual abuse of minors were received by the Victim Assistance Coordinator.

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

Coordinator has worked for the Office of Healing and Prevention since 2003, and also presently serves as Director of the Office of Healing and Prevention.

iii. Codes of Conduct

The Diocese of Worcester maintains a six-page Code of Ministerial Conduct in accordance with the requirements of the *Dallas Charter*.⁷⁴ The code was last revised in April 2021. All employees and volunteers in the diocese are required to agree to and sign the code. These records are kept on file at the place of employment or ministry.

The code prefaces its “general principles of ethics and integrity” with the caution that “all Church Personnel must act responsibly and in a manner that will reflect favorably on the Diocese.” It then continued to prohibit all church personnel from engaging in inappropriate or sexualized physical contact and certain grooming behaviors, such as providing drugs or alcohol to minors, overnight stays with minors, and sleeping in the same bed or sharing a room with minors. Referring to the diocese’s Guidelines for the Use of Social Networking Sites in Parish Program, last updated in 2011, the code of conduct also prohibits befriending or socializing with minors on social media.

The code directs personnel to report perceived violations to supervisors as soon as possible. According to interviews with senior diocesan officials, any perceived code violations involving minors—such as inappropriate boundary issues between a priest and a child parishioner or violations of the diocesan policy on communication with minors—are also reported to the Director of the Office of Healing and Prevention. The Director is expected to conduct an investigation to determine whether a violation has occurred and report the results of that investigation to the Diocesan Review Committee, which is supposed to provide input and recommendations to the bishop. If a violation is established, the bishop retains the sole authority to impose an appropriate penalty.

⁷⁴ According to the *Dallas Charter*, Article 6, “There are to be clear and well publicized diocesan/eparchial standards of ministerial behavior and appropriate boundaries for clergy and for any other paid personnel and volunteers of the Church with regard to their contact with minors.” However, no further guidance was provided, and each diocese has devised their own standards of conduct.

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

iv. Criminal Record Checks

The *Dallas Charter* mandates state criminal background checks (in Massachusetts, CORI checks) for all adults whose positions involve unsupervised contact with children, including all clergy, employees, and volunteers.⁷⁵ Although the *Dallas Charter* does not require background checks to ever be re-run, the USCCB recommends doing so every three to five years as a best practice. The Worcester Diocese mandates criminal background checks every five years for all adults whose positions involve unsupervised contact with children under the age of 18, including clergy, employees, and volunteers. Individuals under the age of 18 who work with children are subject to a Sex Offender Registry Information screening in lieu of a CORI. In Worcester, the Office of Healing and Prevention is responsible for conducting and documenting all CORI/SORI screenings.

Regarding priests specifically, the Worcester Diocese collects personally identifiable information before a priest becomes incardinated in the Worcester Diocese and uses that information to check state-wide databases for criminal activity, including arrests and convictions. It also requires candidates to submit to a federal criminal background investigation, a psychological evaluation by a licensed psychologist, and personal interviews. If a priest comes to the Worcester Diocese from outside Massachusetts, the diocese conducts a broader criminal history check. Visiting clergy are required to provide a letter of suitability from the bishop of their diocese, called a “testimonial,” which is reviewed by Worcester’s bishop prior to assigning a priest to a particular parish within the Worcester Diocese.

v. Review Board

After the implementation of the *Dallas Norms*, on May 30, 2002, the Worcester Diocese promulgated a series of revised policies and procedures for the then-Pastoral Care Committee to address reports of sexual abuse of minors by diocesan personnel and advise the bishop on whether to discipline priests alleged to have abused children and whether to pay for therapy,

⁷⁵ Article 13 of the *Dallas Charter* requires dioceses and eparchies to evaluate the background of clergy, candidates for ordination, educators, employees, and volunteers who minister to children and young people utilizing resources of law enforcement and other community agencies. Article 13 also addresses having policies and procedures in place for obtaining necessary suitability information about priests or deacons who are visiting from other dioceses or religious orders.

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

counseling, or other support for victims. In 2003, Bishop Reilly renamed the Pastoral Care Committee to the Diocesan Review Committee. Since then, the Diocesan Review Committee has included professionals in the fields of child physical and mental health, social services, canon law, civil law, and victim services. As of 2026, the Diocesan Review Committee is composed of seven clergy members and employees of the Worcester Diocese and eleven laypersons, including a city councilmember, a child sexual assault psychologist, a retired state police officer, a child sexual assault specialist, a trauma specialist, a judge, an attorney, a pediatrician, a Greek Orthodox priest, and a physician. The bishop is an ex officio member.

According to the diocesan policy, the charge of the Diocesan Review Committee is to: (1) hear and assess all complaints of sexual abuse of minors made against any diocesan personnel; (2) inform the bishop of any canonical or civil processes which are appropriate; (3) recommend appropriate courses of action, including but not limited to whether the accused person should remain in diocesan or parochial ministry, employment, or volunteer status; (4) advise the bishop regarding pastoral outreach to alleged victims; (5) advise the bishop regarding pastoral outreach to alleged offenders, including but not limited to supervision and treatment; (6) inform the bishop of recent Massachusetts legal developments relative to the protection of minors against sexual abuse; (7) inform the bishop of recent developments in the care of the physical and mental health of children, especially as it relates to the sexual abuse of minors; (8) recommend diocesan awareness programs about abuse, especially sexual abuse of minors, and other available programs; and (9) advise on trends and research involving identifying and protecting against child pornography.

The Diocesan Review Committee also reviews and recommends updates to diocesan policies and procedures that protect children from sexual abuse, including the Policies and Procedures for the Protection of Minors and the Code of Conduct, and it performs audits of the implementation of these procedures in the parishes. Committee members participate in voluntary annual parish audits of Safe Environment Policies and procedures, and report observations and recommendations to the Committee at meetings.

The Diocesan Review Committee hears all new allegations against diocesan personnel involving child sexual abuse of a minor as soon as the allegations are reported to the diocese,

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

regardless of when the alleged conduct took place. This includes allegations against priests and laypersons. The Committee is responsible for determining whether the allegation is credible. The Committee's vote is to be recorded by the Chancellor and Communications Director for the Worcester Diocese in meeting minutes.

In determining credibility, the Committee relies on oral summaries of the victim's allegation provided by the Victim Assistance Coordinator, oral summaries of interviews with the accused priest regarding the allegation, and, if a third-party investigator is used, an oral summary of that investigator's report. Although members of the Committee may ask the Chancellor for permission to examine the accused priest's personnel file, this seldom occurs. Clergy members on the Committee may comment about accused priests and their past assignments in deliberating. The bishop is present for and may provide input during credibility determinations.

If the Committee determines that an allegation against an accused is credible, and the accused is a priest or deacon, the accused should be placed on administrative leave pending further canonical process. High-ranking diocesan management is required to periodically update the Committee as to any canonical process.

Most allegations considered by the Committee have been determined to be credible. The current Chairperson of the Committee told the Attorney General's Office that, during her more than 20 years of service, the Committee has determined all allegations considered by the Committee to be credible.

vi. Investigations into Allegations of Abuse

If the Worcester Diocese receives an allegation of sexual abuse of a minor, it connects the victim with its Victim Assistance Coordinator. The Victim Assistance Coordinator then records the details of the allegations and forwards those details to the bishop and the Vicar General, a high-ranking diocesan staffer who serves as the liaison to the District Attorney. The Diocesan Liaison to the District Attorney calls to report the allegation to the local district attorney's office. If the allegation involves the sexual abuse of a minor presently under the age of 18, the Victim Assistance Coordinator reports the allegation to the Department of Children and Families.

After that, the Victim Assistance Coordinator is expected to gather information to determine whether the abuse has occurred. Typically, the Victim Assistance Coordinator and a

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

member of the Diocesan Review Committee will speak with the victim—either by telephone or in person—and prepare a written report to be signed by the victim. A report is then submitted to the bishop, with a copy to the accused priest. In his role as liaison, the Vicar General informs the District Attorney. The Victim Assistance Coordinator will begin providing pastoral care for the victim and coordinating with the Diocesan Review Committee. Specifically, the Victim Assistance Coordinator is authorized to offer counseling to parishioners who report being victims of sexual abuse for up to twenty-six weeks before the Diocesan Review Committee meeting and subsequent determination on the credibility of the allegation.

Regardless of whether the accused priest is alive or dead, or whether the allegation involves past or current sexual abuse of a child, the Victim Assistance Coordinator is required to notify the Diocesan Review Committee and schedule a meeting. The primary purpose of this meeting is for the Diocesan Review Committee to hear the details of the allegation. The Victim Assistance Coordinator will orally brief the Diocesan Review Committee on the facts of the allegation and any other relevant information about the victim and investigative steps taken to date. Either the bishop, the Liaison to Priests on Leave, the Judicial Vicar, or sometimes the Victim Assistance Coordinator will speak with the accused about the allegations and provide an oral summary of this conversation to the Committee. If a third-party investigator is used, the Victim Assistance Coordinator will orally report the results of the third-party investigation to the Committee. After receiving information about the allegation, the Diocesan Review Committee is expected to receive updates until the investigation is completed and then should make a recommendation to the bishop as to the action that should be taken.

If the Committee determines that the allegation is credible, the priest is required to be automatically removed from ministry, if he has not already been removed. Per the Worcester Diocese's policies and procedures, anonymous allegations are considered insufficient to give reasonable cause to believe abuse has occurred, and the Committee does not investigate or recommend action against an accused priest solely based on an anonymous complaint. Additionally, if the allegations involve deceased priests, the Review Committee is informed of the allegations but the diocese will not conduct an investigation into such allegations or make any determination regarding their credibility.

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

vii. Recordkeeping

The chancellor of the Worcester Diocese is responsible for maintaining diocesan records, which include the personnel records of every priest of the Worcester Diocese, the business records of every parish and institution related to the diocese, and historical documents. Worcester does not distinguish between the diocesan archive, mandated by Canon 486, section 2, and the secret archive which can only be accessed by the bishop and from which no records may be removed.⁷⁶ Since the early 1960s, the archives have been located in a locked vault in the Chancery in the Worcester Diocese. Only the bishop and chancellor have access to the records. Nothing is allowed to be removed from that archive, except to be used for brief periods of time.

Copies of records of allegations of child sexual abuse against priests—including the Victim Assistance Coordinator’s notes of interviews with victims, reports presented to the Diocesan Review Committee, and psychological assessments of accused priests—are maintained in the priest’s personnel file in the secret archives. The Victim Assistance Coordinator retains original copies of her notes and reports in the Office of Healing and Prevention.

Since the adoption of the *Dallas Charter*, it has been the practice of the Worcester Diocese to document the business of the Diocesan Review Committee by maintaining meeting minutes and agendas of meetings. The current chancellor has served on the Committee since its inception and is responsible for recording meeting minutes. Records of the Diocesan Review Committee meetings are also kept in the Chancery.

⁷⁶ See 1983 Code c.486, § 1 (All documents which regard the diocese or parishes must be protected with the greatest care); § 2 (In every curia there is to be erected in a safe place a diocesan archive, or record storage area, in which instruments and written documents which pertain to the spiritual and temporal affairs of the diocese are to be safeguarded after being properly filed and diligently secured); § 3 (An inventory, or catalog, of the documents which are contained in the archive is to be kept with a brief synopsis of each written document). 1983 Code c.489, § 1 (In the diocesan curia there is also to be a secret archive, or at least in the common archive there is to be a safe or cabinet, completely closed and locked, which cannot be removed; in it documents to be kept secret are to be protected most securely); § 2 (Each year documents of criminal cases in matters of morals, in which the accused parties have died or ten years have elapsed from the condemnatory sentence, are to be destroyed. A brief summary of what occurred along with the text of the definitive sentence is to be retained). 1983 Code c.490, § 1 (Only the Bishop is to have the key to the secret archive); § 2 (When a see is vacant, the secret archive or safe is not to be opened except in a case of true necessity by the diocesan administrator himself); § 3 (Documents are not to be removed from the secret archive or safe).

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

viii. Annual Audits

Although not a requirement under the *Dallas Charter*, the Worcester Diocese participates in annual compliance audits conducted by the USCCB to assess the implementation of and compliance with the requirements of the *Charter*.⁷⁷ The audits are currently conducted by Stonebridge Business Partners of Rochester, New York, and the results of the audits are reported annually by the National Review Board.

There are two types of audits conducted, one conducted on-site every three years and data compliance audits conducted in the intervening years of the three-year cycle. The Worcester Diocese's website still reflects that the most recent on-site audit was in 2021. Based on our review of these documents, the Worcester Diocese has been deemed in compliance during these audits since the adoption of the *Dallas Charter*.

ix. Compliance with Mandatory Reporting Laws

After the amendment to Massachusetts's mandatory reporting law in 2002, the policies and procedures of the Worcester Diocese were revised to require all diocesan employees to report current allegations of sexual and physical abuse of minors under the age of 18 to the Department of Children and Families. Our investigation did not reveal any violations of the 2002 update of the Massachusetts mandatory reporting law by the Worcester Diocese.

x. Credibly Accused List

Though the *Charter* calls for openness and transparency, Worcester has refused an open and transparent practice, which is in place in every other diocese in Massachusetts and in over ninety percent of Catholic dioceses nationwide. While it has, since 2002, shared the names of credibly accused priests with the Worcester County District Attorney's Office, and has made transitory disclosure of credibly accused priests on the diocesan website and in its diocesan newspaper, the diocese nevertheless refuses to share the names of these priests publicly in an accessible format.

⁷⁷ As discussed in more detail in Section IX(O), our investigation found that these annual audits are not a reliable means of assessing compliance with the *Dallas Charter* and are more akin to self-reported surveys.

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

VIII. SURVIVORS' EXPERIENCES

This investigation was assisted by many courageous survivors who shared their stories with us. Whether they think of themselves as survivors, victims, or, as one survivor described, “just someone to whom this happened,” these individuals have lived the pain and harm caused by clergy child sexual abuse in the Dioceses of Fall River, Springfield, and Worcester. They paint vivid pictures of the consequences of clergy child sexual abuse and how it continues to shape their lives.

Many victims we spoke with reported their abuse to the dioceses and directly experienced the Review Board process. They spoke with us directly concerning the implementation of the *Dallas Charter* and *Essential Norms* in the Dioceses of Fall River, Springfield, and Worcester, and the effect of the dioceses' processes.

Reporting child sexual abuse is a very difficult process, and the majority of youths who experience sexual assault never report it. It often takes survivors many years before they are able to disclose the abuse they suffered. A research study conducted in Germany with over 1,000 survivors of child sexual abuse discovered that at the time of disclosure, survivors were on average 52 years old.⁷⁸ The reasons for this delayed disclosure are complex. There now is a body of research that analyzes the reasons for delayed disclosure and recognizes its significance and impact on the survivors' ability to receive needed support and avail themselves of the options the legal system has to offer.⁷⁹ The research also addresses many of the misconceptions associated with delayed disclosure or failure to report. A 2013 study found, for example, that the younger a child is at the time of the abuse, the longer the delay in disclosing.⁸⁰ Similarly, the study found that a child abused by multiple perpetrators had greater difficulty disclosing the abuse.⁸¹

⁷⁸ Nina Spröber, Thekla Schneider, Miriam Rassenhofer, et al., *Child Sexual Abuse in Religiously Affiliated and Secular Institutions: A Retrospective Descriptive Analysis of Data Provided by Victims on a Government-sponsored Reappraisal Program in Germany*, 14 *BioMed Central Pub. Health* 282 (2014).

⁷⁹ See, e.g., Child USA, *Delayed Disclosure*, Child USA 2024 Factsheet: A comprehensive report on delayed disclosure in cases of child sexual abuse. Insights, implications, and pathways forward, 4-5 (2024).

⁸⁰ Debbie Allnock & Pam Miller, *No One Noticed, No One Heard: A Study of Disclosures of Childhood Abuse*, Nat'l Soc'y for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, London, 6 (2013), <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/media/1052/no-one-noticed-no-one-heard-report.pdf>.

⁸¹ *Id.*

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

Disclosure of child sexual abuse has been described as a journey.⁸² This journey can include partial disclosures to different individuals and can take place over the course of many years. The exact route is different for each survivor. There are, however, common consequences of child sexual abuse that have been identified in the literature.⁸³ Many survivors of clergy child sexual abuse face challenges that affect them during their lives and that can affect, in particular, their ability and desire to report the abuse they suffered.⁸⁴

Through our investigation, including review of the pertinent documents and conversations with survivors, attorneys, and advocacy groups, we have identified the following non-exclusive list of sequelae that can affect survivors and may affect their ability to report the abuse they experienced:

- Emotional responses, such as PTSD, depression, anxiety, anger;
- Alcohol and substance use;
- Poor overall health;
- Low self-esteem;
- Difficulty in romantic relationships;
- Difficulty in school and employment;
- Difficulty relating to authority figures;
- Desire not to burden those close to them with reports of abuse;
- Fear that they will not be believed;
- Bad experiences during prior attempts to report;
- Shame;
- Guilt about not preventing the abuse of others by the same perpetrator; and
- Repressed memories of the abuse.

Major life events, such as death, birth, marriage, or divorce can trigger the return of symptoms for survivors of child sexual abuse.⁸⁵ In conversations with survivors and several

⁸² *Id.* note 76, at 51-54.

⁸³ See Jane Leserman, Sexual Abuse History: Prevalence, Health Effects, Mediators, and Psychological Treatment. 67 Psychosom. Med. 906, 906-15 (2005); Am. Coll. of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, Comm. Opinion, Adult Manifestations of Childhood Sexual Abuse (2011).

⁸⁴ See Leserman, *supra* note 84, at 906-15.

⁸⁵ Adult Manifestations of Childhood Sexual Abuse, *supra* note 84.

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

attorneys who have represented survivors of clergy child sexual abuse, we have learned that the death of a parent or of the abuser can be a significant factor in enabling survivors to report abuse. Some survivors expressed a desire to shield their parents from knowing that they were abused; for others, their parents' death unburdened them from having to confront their parents' disbelief or anger.⁸⁶ The death of the perpetrator can have a similar unburdening effect. To some degree, the legislature took these factors into account in deciding to extend the statutes of limitations for civil and criminal cases in Massachusetts.⁸⁷

Furthermore, significant public disclosures and news reports about individual perpetrators or the clergy child sexual abuse crisis in the Catholic Church in general have encouraged many survivors to come forward and report their stories. The 2002 *Boston Globe* Spotlight report about the Archdiocese of Boston may have been the most significant of these events, and it prompted many survivors of clergy child sexual abuse to report for the first time. Lawsuits were filed against the dioceses in 2002 and the years that followed. Survivors have also described the 2015 release of the movie "Spotlight" as a triggering event.

While the Archdiocese of Boston was at the center of the *Boston Globe's* 2002 report, other reports about individual abusers, even in far-away dioceses, encouraged survivors in Massachusetts to report their abuse. In 1983, allegations against Gilbert Gauthé, a priest in the Diocese of Lafayette, Louisiana first became public. He was criminally convicted two years later for abusing as many as 39 children between 1972 and 1983. This led to a number of reports of abuse being made to the dioceses in the following years. In the 1990s, several priests with Massachusetts connections were criminally convicted in highly publicized cases. The aftermath of these convictions saw a first wave of civil lawsuits by survivors of clergy child sexual abuse in Massachusetts.

Whatever the reasons for the delay, disclosure of clergy child sexual abuse often occurs over the course of many years. Members of the Diocesan Review Committee in the Worcester Diocese have reported that survivors will often contact the diocese's Office for Healing and

⁸⁶ Rosaleen McElyaney, Disclosure of Child Sexual Abuse: Delays, Non-disclosure and Partial Disclosure. What the Research Tells Us and Implications for Practice. 24 Child Abuse Review 159, 164 (2015), <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1002/car.2280>.

⁸⁷ Section X(B) of this report discusses the civil statute of limitations in Massachusetts and what remains to be done to allow survivors of clergy child sexual abuse to fully access the legal system.

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

Prevention and make oral or partial reports but may not call back until years later to make a full written report. This partial reporting can have significant effects on the support the survivors receive from the Worcester Diocese. Though the Worcester Diocese may assist survivors with some services after a partial disclosure, the diocese will not take formal action against an accused priest or make a report to the District Attorney's Office until a survivor has made a full disclosure and has signed a written report. Despite the diocese's representation that the practice changed in 2013, we saw an example where the diocese followed this practice as late as 2019.

Not all survivors who suffered abuse at the hands of clergy members or employees of the diocese delayed their disclosure. Over the decades, there have been a number of child survivors who immediately sought the help of a trusted adult and disclosed the abuse they suffered. These disclosures, however, did not necessarily have the effect of ending the abuse for the victim, permanently removing the perpetrator from his position in the diocese, or bringing him to justice. One example that stands out is that of a young boy in Worcester in the mid-1980s, who told his priest, Jean-Paul Gagnon, in confession that he had been sexually abused by Raymond Tremblay, a religious education teacher at Holy Name of Jesus parish. Instead of supporting the boy and encouraging him to report the abuse to his parents or the police, Gagnon began abusing the boy and continued to do so for the next three to four years. The survivor did not raise any allegations again until 2002, when he filed a lawsuit against Tremblay and Gagnon. At this point, Gagnon was finally removed from ministry. Similarly, another survivor reported to Bishop Harrington in 1994 that he had been abused by priest John Bagley in Worcester in the late 1960s. The bishop transferred Bagley to another parish in the Worcester Diocese, and Bagley remained in active ministry until 2002, when the survivor contacted the diocese again to follow up on the report he had made eight years earlier.

Certain disclosures did, however, result in contemporaneous consequences for the abuser. For example, around 1989, a teenage survivor visited the state prison in Gardner on a school trip. During a conversation with a prisoner, she felt able to disclose to him that Worcester priest Robert Kelley had abused her over the course of several years. The prisoner told the school guidance counselor about the disclosure, and the counselor in turn reported it to the authorities, leading to Kelley's first criminal conviction in 1990.

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

IX. CRITICISMS OF POST-2002 DIOCESAN RESPONSE TO ALLEGATIONS OF SEXUAL ABUSE

Despite the significant reforms by all three dioceses in 2002 and the years that followed, this investigation identified certain internal and systemic failures, some of which persist within the dioceses today. Though we heard from many caring and committed individuals serving as diocesan employees and volunteers, who do their best on a daily basis to properly address past, present, and future concerns relating to the sexual abuse of minors within the Catholic Church, we also observed flaws of varying degrees across all three dioceses in areas essential to child protection, including training, investigation of allegations, recordkeeping, and auditing.

Since 2002, all three dioceses also have—in various ways—failed to follow their own internal procedures in investigating allegations of sexual abuse and removing offending priests from ministry. We observed that even where priests who were credibly accused of sexual abuse were suspended from ministry by the diocese, all three dioceses failed to adopt or implement adequate measures for supervising these priests to ensure that they complied with restrictions placed on them to protect the public. Numerous offending priests in each diocese were thus neither removed from the clerical state, nor monitored by the diocese.

External pressures, including media scrutiny and lawsuits, can temporarily bring these issues into focus. Ultimately, however, the responsibility rests at the highest level of each diocese. Only a culture shift at that level and a true commitment to following the word and spirit of the *Dallas Charter* and *Essential Norms* will effectuate these directives as intended.

Below we discuss certain correctable shortcomings in the dioceses' current abuse detection, reporting, and protection systems.

A. Efforts to Circumvent the Policies and Procedures that Protect Children

The *Dallas Charter* and *Essential Norms* were meant to be a watershed moment in the Church's response to child sexual abuse. The central tenet of the *Charter* and *Norms* is the "zero-tolerance" policy: when even a single act of sexual abuse by a priest or deacon is admitted or established after an appropriate investigation, the *Charter* requires that the offending priest or

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

deacon be **permanently** removed from ministry and, if warranted, dismissed from the clerical state.⁸⁸

The policy allows a bishop to temporarily remove priests accused of sexual abuse of a minor from ministry while the diocese conducts a preliminary investigation of the allegation.⁸⁹ This removal is a temporary measure for the safety of the church and lay community. The *Essential Norms* require that this preliminary investigation be timely and objective.⁹⁰ The results of this investigation are to be presented to the diocese's Review Board, which is to provide the bishop with an assessment of the allegation.⁹¹

If the allegations are determined to be credible, bishops are required to refer the priest to the CDF, a group of senior officials at the Vatican who advise the bishop on how to proceed.⁹² The CDF can either decide the case on its own or order a canonical trial of the accused priest in the diocese or before the CDF. If the abuse is established, the accused priest is to be permanently removed from ministry. The priest may be laicized (removed from the clerical state) or sentenced to a life of prayer and penance. Once removed from ministry, the priest cannot wear clerical garb or present himself as a priest.

⁸⁸ See Dallas Charter, Article 5; *Essential Norms*, Norm 8.

⁸⁹ *Essential Norms*, Norm 9: For "the sake of the common good and observing the provisions of canon law, the [diocesan Bishop] shall exercise [the] power of governance to ensure that any priest or deacon who has committed even one act of sexual abuse of a minor...shall not continue in active ministry." The purpose of the preliminary investigation is indicated in 1983 Code c.1717, § 1: "[the ordinary] is carefully to inquire personally or through another suitable person about the facts, circumstances, and imputability, unless such an inquiry seems entirely superfluous." See also CCEO c.1468, § 1.

⁹⁰ See *Essential Norms*, Norm 6 ("When an allegation of sexual abuse of a minor by a priest or deacon is received, a preliminary investigation in accordance with canon law will be initiated and conducted promptly and objectively [citing 1983 Code c.1717] . . ."); *Dallas Charter*, Article 2 ("Dioceses [] are to have policies and procedures in place to respond promptly to any allegation where there is reason to believe that sexual abuse of a minor has occurred").

⁹¹ See Dallas Charter, Article 2.

⁹² See *Essential Norms*, Norm 8: "When even a single act of sexual abuse by a priest or deacon is admitted or is established after an appropriate process in accord with canon law, the offending priest or deacon will be removed permanently from ecclesiastical ministry, not excluding dismissal from the clerical state, if the case so warrants ([1983 Code c.1395, § 2])." In every case involving canonical penalties, the processes provided for in canon law must be observed, and the various provisions of canon law must be considered (*cf. Canonical Delicts Involving Sexual Misconduct and Dismissal from the Clerical State*, 1995; Letter from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, May 18, 2001). Unless the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, having been notified, calls the case to itself because of special circumstances, it will direct the diocesan bishop/eparch to proceed (Article 13, 'Procedural Norms' for *Motu proprio Sacramentorum sanctitatis tutela*, AAS, 93, 2001, p. 787) . . ."

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

Additionally, consistent with the *Charter's* commitment to openness and transparency, dioceses must “deal as openly as possible with members of the community” when supporting parishes directly affected by clergy sexual abuse.⁹³ However, our investigation found that despite the Church’s variety of new policies initiated in 2002, the *practices* of the Worcester and Fall River Dioceses for dealing with abuse investigations and reporting in the ensuing years continued to have the effect of concealing the extent and seriousness of clergy abuse from the public. In some cases, the Fall River and Worcester Dioceses allowed accused priests to retire or resign shortly before or after the adoption of the *Charter* and *Norms*, effectively circumventing the formal review process mandated by new church policies and procedures to protect children. In fact, until as recently as 2020, the Fall River Diocese did not consult its Review Board for allegations against retired priests, or those already removed or restricted from ministry. As late as 2022, it did not hear allegations against resigned priests. Whether this is still the case presently is not clear from the Ministerial Review Board policy, which is silent on the issue. In other cases, accused clergy were administratively suspended but not effectively supervised during the decades that it took the Fall River and Worcester Dioceses, and ultimately, the Catholic Church as a whole, to fully adjudicate their cases and, in some cases, to remove them from the clerical state. And, for nearly twenty years after its adoption of the *Dallas Charter*, the Fall River Diocese failed to refer many types of sexual abuse complaints to its Review Board, largely ignoring the *Charter's* mandate that such complaints be reviewed by these independent panels. While the Fall River Diocese overhauled its written procedures for addressing allegations of clergy sex abuse in 2020, as of this writing, Worcester’s policies remain unchanged.

i. Permitting Accused Priests to Retire or Resign Rather than Investigating and Adjudicating Sexual Abuse Complaints

When the dioceses circumvented the Review Board process by permitting accused priests to retire or resign, rather than requiring allegations against them to be scrutinized by Review Boards, they diverted cases away from a new adjudicatory process at the center of their post-2002 reforms and limited the public’s access to critical information regarding the priests’ status.

⁹³ Dallas Charter, Article 7.

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

Some accused priests believed retirement or resignation of their pastorate was a substitute for submitting to the Review Boards or to Vatican oversight. Other priests were even permitted to retire after the Review Board had convened to adjudicate allegations of abuse against them.

Diversion away from established procedures protected the reputations of both the accused priests as well as the dioceses and the Church as a whole. In failing to subject accused priests to a review process that may have ended in their permanent removal from ministry, the Church chose to let them maintain the appearance of being members in good standing of the church community for the remainder of their lives. These retired priests left public ministry but retained much of the cache and social capital they enjoyed as priests. Announcements referenced retirements for medical or personal reasons, and priests received sympathy from unknowing parishioners.

Perhaps most concerning, with or without their bishop's official permission, these accused priests were often able to continue to present to the public as priests in good standing. Though they no longer had a pastorate, they sometimes appeared in public in cleric's clothes—sometimes in contravention of a direct order from the bishop. Our investigation revealed examples of accused priests with suspended faculties who appeared in rectories, officiated at wedding ceremonies, or celebrated Mass at funerals where they presented themselves as “retired priests.” Some priests, largely unwatched by diocesan or civil authorities, chose careers or volunteer opportunities that put them in different positions of trust and authority. Many of these priests went on to work with vulnerable populations: as public schoolteachers, scout leaders, or in social service fields where they worked closely with individuals with disabilities. Others moved overseas, where they worked in educational or other settings without any oversight of their activities. As a result, they remained a significant risk to a public that was never made aware of what the Church knew—that these men were the subjects of credible allegations of child sexual abuse.

Meanwhile, the lack of an investigation into the allegations against these priests denied survivors validation and closure and ignored the possibility that other survivors may have come forward as a result of an investigation. It also made it impossible to determine whether other clergy, including those who were alive and involved in the Church, helped conceal the abuse.

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

Without any formal investigation or adjudication of the allegations, the offending priests were shielded from public identification and the Church avoided damaging publicity that formal discipline, such as laicization, would have entailed, while it simultaneously failed to effectively monitor these retired priests to ensure they were not permitted access to children.

Our investigation revealed multiple instances after 2002 where the Dioceses of Worcester and Fall River permitted accused priests to retire or resign and failed to permanently remove them from ministry, inconsistent with the formal review processes mandated by the *Dallas Charter*, the *Essential Norms*, and their own written policies.

For example, in the early 1980s, the Worcester Diocese was informed of an allegation that Raymond Messier had sexually abused a minor at a camp in Charlton. The minor victim's mother reported that when she disclosed the sexual abuse to Bishop Harrington, he assured her that the priest would never be in a position to have contact with children again and would receive treatment at the House of Affirmation. Despite those promises, Bishop Harrington later reassigned the priest to three other parishes where he continued to minister. More than twenty years later, in the wake of the Church's adoption of the *Dallas Charter* in June 2002, the Worcester Diocese removed Messier from his parish assignments, assuring the public in a statement that he would not be engaging in any public ministry in the diocese or elsewhere. That same year, the diocese was named in a lawsuit alleging two additional complaints against Messier for sexually abusing minors in the 1970s, when he was at the parish of St. Joan of Arc in Worcester. Despite these new complaints and his administrative suspension, the priest continued to receive wages from the Worcester Diocese. At the end of 2002, Bishop Reilly publicly promised to refer the sexual abuse allegations against the priest to the Vatican. The following year, the Judicial Vicar for Canonical Affairs for the Worcester Diocese announced that the diocese was moving forward with a canonical trial for the priest, stating that victims who wanted to be involved in the tribunals could approach the Worcester Diocese. Yet, this priest was permitted to retire in 2003. As a retired priest, he was entitled to compensation and benefits from the Worcester Diocese. The diocese produced no evidence that it engaged in any meaningful effort to supervise the priest or restrict his contact with children between 2003 and

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

the priest's death in 2018. Even today, the Worcester Diocese refuses to make the scope and nature of the allegations against the priest publicly known.

In another case, the Worcester Diocese was notified in 2002 of an allegation that a priest had sexually abused a minor in the 1980s. In April 2002, the priest was removed from his parish assignment and placed on administrative leave. The priest's suspension was explained to parishioners during Mass held the week of the announcement. Bishop Reilly publicly stated that the Worcester Diocese was moving forward with a canonical trial of the priest, as required by the *Dallas Charter* and *Essential Norms*. But we have not seen any evidence that any such trial occurred. The diocese produced no evidence or documentation of the opening or closing of investigations into complaints of sexual abuse or of a referral to the CDF, and no canonical sentence has been made public. Multiple complaints of sexual abuse against this priest subsequently emerged. In June 2003, a civil suit was filed against the priest and the Worcester Diocese, alleging that he sexually abused a boy in the late 1970s at a Catholic co-educational high school. Yet, the priest was permitted to resign as pastor of his parish in June 2003. He remained an incardinated priest until his death in 2017 and continued to receive a salary and insurance from the diocese. The diocese produced no evidence that it engaged in any effort to meaningfully supervise him or restrict his contact with children after he was allowed to resign in 2003. Even today, the Worcester Diocese refuses to make the scope and nature of the allegations against this priest publicly known.

In March 2002, the Fall River Diocese received a complaint alleging that a priest sexually abused a young girl in the 1960s. A corroborating witness also came forward, describing abuse he had witnessed. When the bishop confronted the priest that same day, the priest resigned. In a letter to parishioners notifying them of the allegation, then-Bishop O'Malley noted that "[t]his tragedy ends the career of a priest who has served [the] parish effectively for many years." The diocese confirmed to the press that though the priest resigned, his resignation was not an admission of guilt. This representation is at odds with Bishop O'Malley's later outreach to the victim: in a letter from Bishop O'Malley that she shared with the press, he wrote that the priest had "expressed his regrets" to him and he hoped he would also reach out to do the same to her. Following the priest's resignation in 2002, the Fall River Diocese received additional allegations

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

that the priest had sexually abused minors. The diocese would ultimately reach civil settlements with four survivors. Though this priest was removed from public ministry, and he remained ordained until his death in 2014, we did not find any evidence that the Fall River Diocese engaged in any effort to meaningfully supervise the priest after he was allowed to resign in 2002.

ii. Failure to Timely Adjudicate Sexual Abuse Complaints

While some accused priests were permitted to retire or resign in lieu of submitting to a formal review process, many others were administratively suspended. However, the details of the abuse allegations that led to their suspensions were frequently withheld from parishioners and the public. And the dioceses would typically not provide updates or release any information to the public regarding the status of any internal investigation, including any credibility determination or canonical process unless or until a canonical sentence was imposed. Although the *Dallas Charter* and *Essential Norms* required prompt investigation of complaints, it took the dioceses, and, ultimately, the Catholic Church, many years (in some cases, decades) to fully adjudicate these complaints.

Had the complaints against these priests been adjudicated sooner, they would have been subject to canonical penalties potentially including laicization. Once laicized, these priests would not be entitled to income as clerics, nor to retirement, housing, and other benefits. And, they would be permanently prohibited from exercising priestly ministry, presenting themselves as priests, or using the title of “Father.” Instead, they continued to receive financial support as priests and, in certain cases, continued to receive support from unknowing parishioners who were unaware of the abuse allegations against them.

In the absence of publicly available lists of credibly accused clergy, delayed adjudication of allegations against clergy operated to conceal the actual nature and scope of sexual abuse allegations in the dioceses. Moreover, because the status of a suspended priest was not immediately apparent to parishioners and because the dioceses did not publicize the names of credibly accused priests, the general public was left in the dark about the actual nature and number of clergy sexual abuse allegations in the dioceses. In this way, the dioceses did not offer the transparency required by the *Dallas Charter* and *Essential Norms* and effectively precluded public consideration of their response to sexual abuse allegations. And sexual abuse survivors

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

who reported their abuse to the church suffered as a consequence. These victims were left without any resolution to their cases for years and sometimes decades.

By the end of 2002, the year the *Dallas Charter* was adopted, the Worcester Diocese was aware of priests accused of sexual abuse who were still alive and (a) were already on leave due to abuse allegations; (b) had previously been allowed to retire with pending sexual abuse complaints against them; or (c) were placed on leave in 2002 as a result of sexual abuse complaints. Of these priests, several were permitted to retire and 11 were subsequently laicized. The rest remained priests of the Worcester Diocese, whose faculties have been removed.

In Worcester, senior diocesan officials knew of the diocese's failure to timely adjudicate sexual abuse complaints. One senior diocesan official acknowledged that during the decade after the *Charter* was adopted the diocese failed to timely refer accused priests to the CDF. To date, the Worcester Diocese has refused to make the accused priests' names public beyond announcing their administrative leave at Mass in the local parishes or in the Catholic Free Press.

In 2003, the Judicial Vicar for Canonical Affairs for the Worcester Diocese announced that the Worcester Diocese was moving forward with canonical trials for six priests accused of sexual abuse. In the public announcement, the Judicial Vicar noted that the priests had been "hanging in limbo" for some time, that victims were waiting for the process to begin, and that "justice delayed is justice denied." Yet, two of the priests retired in 2003 and a third resigned in 2003, with no evidence of a formal determination against them. Only two priests were later laicized, but not until 2018 and 2020, respectively. The sixth died in 2017, still a priest. In those intervening years, the Worcester Diocese continued to receive allegations against five of these six priests. The diocese never publicized the allegations. Moreover, the diocese continued to financially support many of these priests, providing them with compensation, benefits, and other resources at their disposal.

The Fall River Diocese lists 50 diocesan priests on its Credibly Accused List; of these, 33 are listed as deceased. By the end of 2002, the year in which the *Dallas Charter* was adopted, the diocese was on notice of 18 priests accused of sexual abuse who were still alive and (a) were already on leave due to abuse allegations; (b) had previously been allowed to retire with pending sexual abuse complaints against them; or (c) were placed on leave in 2002 as a result of sexual

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

abuse complaints. Of these priests, one was permitted to retire in 2015, and five were subsequently laicized. Another priest remained active in the diocese for years, until the diocese undertook its 2020 review of past claims of child sexual abuse. He is presently listed on the Fall River Diocese Credibly Accused List.

Even when the Fall River Diocese did seek to laicize its priests, we saw long lags between the diocese's learning of an allegation of child sexual abuse and its referral of the case to the CDF. Within the last few years, the diocese has referred at least two accused priests to the CDF more than two decades after receiving complaints regarding their alleged abuse of children. In some cases, in which the diocese made an initial referral to the CDF, the diocese failed to respond to repeated requests from the CDF for additional information over many years. Ultimately, we saw that where the CDF did not receive sufficient information from the diocese, it often eventually archived the case without further action. During this time, the diocese did not adequately monitor suspended priests, such that, in some cases, it was wholly unaware of their whereabouts.

iii. Failure to Consult Review Boards on Assessments of Sexual Abuse Complaints

Until recently, the Fall River Diocese did not meet the mandate of the *Dallas Charter* that U.S. dioceses investigate sexual abuse allegations through Review Boards. For nearly twenty years after the adoption of the *Charter*, the Fall River Diocese prevented its Review Board from adjudicating allegations against certain classes of priests, specifically those who: were retired or had resigned; had died; were removed or restricted from ministry at the time the diocese received the complaint; members of religious orders; or incardinated in other dioceses. Instead, the diocese often relied on informal processes and resolutions lacking formal structure; as a result, fewer personnel learned of the allegations. One former high-level diocesan employee described the process as involving a conversation among the bishop, the victim assistance coordinator and select high-ranking diocesan personnel, which would result in a recommendation of how to handle an allegation and whether the accused priest should be removed from ministry. This practice continued until 2020, after the Attorney General initiated this investigation. The decision to bypass the Review Board permitted offending priests to quietly

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

retire or resign and allowed some accused priests to remain in active ministry in the diocese and serve in other dioceses.

Until 2020, the Fall River Review Board did not meet regularly. For a period of time, it met only annually, and one member described a period of approximately two years during which it did not meet at all. One former diocesan employee with whom we spoke stated that the Review Board was convened only if there was a question of the credibility of the allegation or if the diocese anticipated that the claim would attract public attention. Other cases were resolved informally among a group that included the bishop and a handful of high-ranking diocese officials and employees, without the input of the board. The Review Board seemed unaware that the bishop was not referring entire categories of sexual abuse complaints to it for adjudication.⁹⁴

Our review indicates that during the 27 years between the inception of its Review Board in 1993 and July 2020, the Fall River Diocese submitted fewer than a third of the allegations of child sexual abuse it received to the Review Board for a determination of credibility. The remaining allegations do not appear to have been the subject of such review. We note that this finding is not inconsistent with the statement of one longtime staff member who estimated that the Review Board heard only thirty to forty percent of allegations submitted to the diocese.

Two particular cases of the bishop's failure to consult the Review Board stand out in Fall River. As early as 2006, the Fall River Diocese learned of an allegation that one of its priests had sexually abused a minor in the 1990s while chaperoning an overnight trip with students. The Victim Assistance Coordinator working for the diocese at the time met with the victim, and he described the abuse he had suffered. When the victim contacted the diocese to check on the status of the investigation six months later, there was no reply. The victim did not hear from the diocese again for thirteen years, until 2019. The case was not heard by the Review Board, and the priest remained in service without any restriction. In fact, Bishop Coleman permitted the priest to chaperone overnight school fieldtrips in 2008, 2009, 2012, and 2013. The victim spent

⁹⁴ For example, when interviewed, several current members of the Fall River Ministerial Review Board did not know whether it was diocesan policy for the Board to hear cases against dead or resigned priests. It was not. In fact, more than one member falsely believed that the Board *was* mandated to hear such cases and discussed with investigators how important this sort of closure is to victims even when the perpetrator is deceased.

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

the following thirteen years searching for his abuser online, watching him move from one assignment to the next, often serving at parishes with schools.

Years later, in 2014, the Fall River Diocese received another complaint that the same priest had sexually abused a minor altar boy decades earlier. A contracted investigator was assigned. This investigator described the 2014 complaint as credible, but reported that midway through his work, he was instructed by a senior diocesan official that the diocese would “handle it” and no further investigation was needed. When asked if he knew what that meant, the investigator replied, “Yeah, I’ve been here all my life. It meant they’d tell [the priest] to be a good boy.” The Fall River Diocese denies that the investigator was so instructed. The Diocese does not, however, dispute that the Review Board was not convened to hear either the 2006 or the 2014 complaint against the priest. The diocese took no action to limit the priest’s ministry, meaningfully supervise him, or prevent him from having access to children. Indeed, the diocese issued celebrats for the priest on at least two occasions after the 2006 allegation. And, months after the second complaint was received, the bishop once again permitted the priest to chaperone an overnight school trip for a Catholic school. In 2017, Bishop da Cunha appointed him pastor of a parish with an associated school that served children in preschool through eighth grade.

The priest retained full faculties within the Fall River Diocese until 2019, when at last Bishop da Cunha suspended and ultimately removed him from ministry. It was not until 2020 that the Ministerial Review Board heard the 2006, 2014, and 2019 complaints against the priest and found all three to be credible. He is presently on the diocese’s Credibly Accused List.

In another case, in 2017, a survivor reported that he was abused by a Fall River priest in the early 1970s at a church-sponsored summer camp. Though he would be ordained in 1982 and serve in the Fall River Diocese for most of the next three decades, at the time of the abuse, the priest was not yet ordained and was a summer employee of the diocesan camp. Bishop da Cunha interviewed the priest himself in 2017 (but only documented the conversation in writing two years later). A diocese employee from the Office of Safe Environment interviewed the survivor and a witness to the abuse who corroborated the survivor’s allegation. Although the investigating staff member reported to us that she urged the bishop to suspend the priest, the

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

case was not heard by the Review Board and the priest remained in active ministry. When questioned about these decisions, a high-level church employee involved in the investigation recalled that the allegations were determined to be “inconclusive or not credible” and highlighted the fact that the accused priest was not even in seminary at the time of the abuse. Two years later, in 2019, that the priest was placed on leave and his case was referred to the Ministerial Review Board. In 2021, following that referral, the diocese determined the priest to have been credibly accused.

In the Worcester Diocese, we learned that the Diocese’s Review Committee maintains only very limited written minutes of the meetings held. Allegations are presented orally to the Review Committee which generally does not review the priest’s file and does not hear directly from the accused priest or the victim. Allegations are usually found credible unless the timing and location of the allegations cannot be corroborated based on the priest's assignments. Our investigation also identified several occasions when sexual abuse complaints were not adjudicated by the Review Committee. One priest was placed on administrative leave in 2002, after the Worcester Diocese learned of a complaint that he had sexually abused a minor between 1986 and 1988. After an initial allegation was referred to the Review Committee, numerous additional allegations of sexual abuse were made against him dating from the late 1970s to 1994. Not all of these complaints were reviewed by the Review Committee. Meanwhile, the priest repeatedly violated restrictions on his ministry by, for example, holding weekly rehearsals with an adult chorus at an elementary school and inviting children to sing in his adult choir. The diocese continued to compensate this priest and provide him with other insurance benefits until his laicization in 2018. To this date, the Worcester Diocese has refused to publicly acknowledge the number or nature of credible allegations it has received against this priest.

In the Springfield Diocese, our investigation indicated that abuse allegations generally were referred to its Review Board and, ultimately, to the Vatican. Still, we uncovered a few instances where sexual abuse complaints were not thoroughly investigated. For example, in 2012, the Springfield Diocese was notified of a complaint that the pastor of a parish had sexually abused a child in the 1980s. Although an investigation into that allegation began, it was never completed and was not adjudicated by the Review Board. In 2017, this priest received a letter of

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

suitability for a pilgrimage outside the United States. He continued to serve in various capacities within the Diocese of Springfield, including organizing teen retreats and working directly with children through the Board of Youth Ministry until he retired in 2019. It was not until 2020, after the victim's father reached out to the diocese to follow up on the status of the complaint, that the case was forwarded to the District Attorney's Office pursuant to the MOU.⁹⁵

B. Failure to Adequately Monitor Priests Accused of Child Sexual Abuse

Post-2002, all three dioceses implemented restrictions on the ministry of some accused clergy. Yet, the Attorney General's investigation revealed that none of the three dioceses adopted or implemented adequate measures for supervising or monitoring priests on leave or retired priests who were credibly accused of sexual abuse to enforce compliance with public safety restrictions intended to mitigate the danger those men posed. Certain priests were directed to receive psychological treatment, then released into the community. Others were placed in a structured living community. Still others were allowed to live freely for years, even decades, without adjudication of the allegations against them and without meaningful oversight of their activities. Because they had not been permanently removed from ministry or laicized and the dioceses did not provide any notice to the public regarding the status of these priests, the public had no knowledge of the number, nature, or credibility of the allegations against them. In sum, the dioceses failed to adequately inform the public of credibly accused priests, and also failed to supervise compliance with the restrictions they placed on those priests. In particular, the Fall River and Worcester Dioceses' practice of professing a zero-tolerance policy, while implementing one that falls significantly short of that standard, has serious ramifications on public safety.

While the bishop of each diocese has the authority to revoke an accused priest's faculties and prevent him from public ministry, this does not remove him from the clerical state. In interviews with the Attorney General's Office, senior diocesan officials claimed that laicizing offending priests would allow them to go out into society unsupervised, and perhaps even untreated. Once laicized, the Church no longer has any authority to monitor these priests, leaving opportunities

⁹⁵ The diocese claims to have made an initial disclosure to law enforcement in September 2012.

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

for them to come into contact with children and potentially reoffend. These officials argue that the diocese has more options to impose restrictions and monitoring on priests who do not leave the Church. To be sure, when placing accused priests on administrative leave, the dioceses did endeavor to place restrictions on them, such as prohibiting them from engaging in active ministry, wearing clerical attire, or administering sacraments. But even though the dioceses formally maintained restrictions on these unlaicized members of the clergy, as discussed in Section IX(C) of this report, they have simultaneously disclaimed any ability to enforce these restrictions, which have so often been invisible to the public.

Our investigation produced no evidence that any of the three dioceses had effective written policies in place for supervising offender priests. For example, the Fall River Diocese had never had a formal policy for monitoring priests whose faculties have been suspended, either pending an investigation or following adjudication of a claim of child sexual abuse. Diocese staff have reported to us that the church is ill-suited to perform such a task, or that it is unnecessary. One former high-level employee from the Fall River Diocese told us that monitoring credibly accused priests was not required because they “know what they are not permitted to do.” We have reached the opposite conclusion, as we encountered numerous examples of suspended priests appearing in public in cleric’s clothes, publicly celebrating sacraments, and disregarding restrictions on their ministry imposed by the bishop. Within the past few years, the Fall River Diocese created a crisis team meant to support clergy dealing with issues ranging from abuse allegations to substance use diagnoses. However, the Diocese does not have a formalized mechanism for monitoring accused priests’ adherence to limitations on their ministry. As one former high-level church official in Fall River acknowledged, the system for monitoring priests has been and is reactive, addressing issues, for example, when “there was a sighting” of a priest wearing vestments in violation of restrictions. This, he said, remains “an active weakness” in the diocese’s system for handling clergy sexual abuse cases, one he described as having not been addressed due to a lack of “bandwidth.”

Even the most basic effort to periodically verify the employment status of credibly accused clergy could provide some measure of public protection and avoid concerning situations. In 1986, Bishop Cronin barred one particularly prolific offender from public ministry but allowed

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

him to resign his pastorate and cite medical reasons for his departure, and he was not laicized. Three years later, the accused priest went on to become a regular substitute teacher in a public school on Cape Cod, remaining in that position for nine years. In 2003, in response to a press inquiry regarding how the diocese could permit the man, who remained a priest of the Fall River Diocese, to work for nearly a decade as a substitute teacher, the diocese's spokesman professed a lack of knowledge of the priest's employment, stating that it "did not have the right to keep [the priest] under lock and key," and that the priest "was under no obligation to report [the position] to the diocese."⁹⁶

Post-2002, the Dioceses of Springfield and Worcester created positions for "clergy monitors" or "priest monitors." We learned during our investigation that the duties and responsibilities of this position included supervising priests on leave due to sexual abuse allegations. However, in practice, priest monitors kept only sporadic contact with accused priests and in interviews could not account for accused priests' whereabouts, status, or compliance with their terms of ministry. Nor were suspended/restricted priests required to provide written reports of their activities, outlining any contact or planned contact with minors, or information or proof that they were regularly attending treatment. Notably, the Worcester Diocese has no policy regarding how frequently accused priests should interact with their monitors, how accused priests should be contacted or supervised, whether accused priests are required to stay away from minors, how to protect children who attend parish or school activities from these priests, or establishing clear repercussions for failing to abide by the restrictions on their ministry would be. Although the Springfield Diocese had a written monitoring policy requiring individualized safety plans for restricted/suspended priests, that policy was never implemented.

Moreover, both the Worcester and Springfield Dioceses viewed the priest monitor role as pastoral, with a focus on the financial, housing, medical, and other needs of supervised clergy, rather than on ensuring compliance with ministry restrictions and eliminating or mitigating any risk to the community. Indeed, one former official from the Worcester Diocese, who held the priest monitor position between 2014 and 2018, told us that he viewed his role as more of a

⁹⁶ *Another Dirty Secret*, Cape Cod Times (Nov. 29, 2003), <https://www.capecodtimes.com/story/news/2003/11/29/another-dirty-secret/50941522007/>.

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

“spiritual director” for these priests—“to be their friend, to let them know that there was someone there...to make sure they were well taken care of, that they had a support group, that their health, spiritual, and financial issues were addressed.” While pastoral support for these priests may be helpful to the cause of keeping the public safe, pastoral-focused support, without more, is insufficient to accomplish that goal.

In the Worcester Diocese, we found that the priest monitors did not prioritize (or, in some cases, undertake) the supervision of priests for whom they were responsible. The Diocese did not collect basic statistical information—such as the total numbers of accused priests on leave, complaints against accused priests on leave, allegations presented to the Review Committee, or settlements paid to victims. The Worcester Diocese produced few, if any, reports containing information about priest monitors’ supervision or observations of offender priests. When we asked a former official from the Worcester Diocese about his recordkeeping practices, he admitted that he kept no records of his activity in the four years in which he served as priest monitor and stated that he would shred his notes of conversations with accused priests regarding non-compliance after sharing them with the bishop.

Our investigation found that the primary focus of clergy monitors in the Springfield Diocese was the pastoral needs of the credibly accused priest, rather than whether that priest was complying with the terms of his restrictions on ministry. Our investigation further revealed that priest monitors could not be sure whether accused priests were living in accordance with the terms of their suspensions or engaging in activities that brought them into close or regular contact with parish children.

The clergy monitor role in the Springfield Diocese no longer exists and has not existed since at least 2014. Despite an attempt by the Review Board to hire a new monitor and make the position more effective, Bishop Rozanski elected not to fill the vacancy, citing, in part, the cost. Though the Springfield Diocese was, in recent years, reportedly working on reestablishing the clergy monitor position, there are currently priests in the Diocese who were removed from ministry for sexual misconduct and are not subject to standardized monitoring.

The choice to neither actively pursue laicization for credibly accused priests nor adequately supervise such priests and inform the public of their status created situations in which

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

these men remained priests—albeit with suspended faculties—moving through their community with all the esteem that entailed. With no apparent consequences, one such priest identified himself as a “diocesan priest” and a “Catholic chaplain” in written publications for nearly a decade and a half after he was accused of sexually abusing a child. His laicization would not be completed until 2020, nearly thirty years after the allegation. The practice of leaving suspended priests in limbo for years and even decades is especially troubling given that none of the three dioceses that are the subject of this investigation has effective systems in place to meaningfully monitor suspended priests. We learned of accused priests who, in violation of restrictions placed on their ministry by their bishops, wore clerical garb, appeared in rectories, or appeared in religious education centers. Others defied prohibitions on their contact with children. Even fellow priests sometimes seemed unaware of the magnitude of the allegations against their colleagues, believing their transgressions to be relatively minor. In one case, we interviewed a priest who did not know the specifics of one offender’s offenses, despite the offending priest having over a dozen serious allegations against him. The priest recalled inviting the offender out to lunch out of concern for the loneliness he experienced as a priest whose faculties were restricted. In the Worcester Diocese, anyone encountering these priests during the many years between their suspensions and eventual laicization would have no reason to suspect that they had been credibly accused of sexual abuse or to take any appropriate measures to limit their access to children. In the Fall River Diocese, the same was true until the 2021 publication of its Credibly Accused List.

In all, it is evident from our investigation that the dioceses have not committed the necessary resources required to supervise, monitor, and assess the dangerousness of priests who have been or will be removed from ministry because they sexually abused children. This shortcoming is exacerbated in those cases when the diocese has not put the public on notice of credible accusations against particular priests. In the fall of 2022, after investigators expressed concern about the practice, the Fall River Diocese committed to stop listing in the Catholic Directory those priests prohibited from public ministry due to sexual abuse allegations. The Springfield Diocese presently does not list any such priests in the Directory. The Worcester Diocese continues to list some but not all accused priests.

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

C. Failure to Adequately Address Violations of Restrictions on Ministry

Our investigation revealed numerous instances across all three dioceses of accused priests violating restrictions on their ministry.

In most of these instances, the violations were reported to the diocese by a third party, rather than discovered by the dioceses themselves. And, in most instances, priest monitors did not take any action in response. The most common response identified by our investigation was a letter from the bishop to the accused priest, reminding him of his restrictions and, in some cases, threatening further canonical action or a reduction of financial support if the priest did not comply. Repeated violations were often addressed with additional warning letters. We did not find these violations to be the basis for further restrictions or laicization. This minimal enforcement action left accused priests as a risk to the lay church community and the general public, potentially jeopardizing the safety of children. Below we describe some examples from each of the three dioceses of their failure to adequately address violations of restrictions placed on offender priests' ministry.

In the Worcester Diocese, one former priest who was placed on leave by Bishop Harrington in 1993, continued to present himself as a priest as late as 2006. The diocese settled a lawsuit that same year for \$35,000 with a victim who was sexually abused by the priest when the victim was a teenager. In 2002, the priest was included on the Worcester Diocese's list of priests on leave. Two years later, the diocese sent him a warning letter that his financial support could be reduced if he continued appearing as a priest in public. In 2006, the victim reported to Bishop McManus that he had encountered the priest at a wake at a local funeral home, where he appeared in clerical garb and signed the condolence book as a priest. The victim demanded that the priest be laicized, which did not occur until 2014. When confronted in public with reports that the priest continued to celebrate sacraments, including weddings, the spokesperson for the diocese simply noted that these sacraments were not "valid in the eyes of the church."

Another priest from the Worcester Diocese, who was placed on leave by the bishop in 2003 after allegations surfaced that he sexually abused a boy in the 1980s, repeatedly defied the bishop's orders to refrain from publicly appearing as a priest. The priest refused to resign from his parish until 2005, after he pleaded guilty in a criminal case to sexually assaulting an adult

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

victim. Even after his resignation, the priest continued to defy restrictions, publicly celebrating Mass and taking parishioners on a pilgrimage, which led the bishop to threaten him with a reduction in his monthly pay.

In the Fall River Diocese, we found many instances in which priests whose faculties were suspended due to credible allegations of sexual abuse of minors continued to present in public as priests and even celebrate sacraments. For example, the Fall River Diocese incrementally restricted the ministry of one priest, whose history reflected consistent warnings and complaints regarding his predation on minors that began during his time in seminary in the late 1960s. Disregarding restrictions on him, the priest repeatedly appeared in cleric's clothes in and around parishes and was the subject of anonymous complaints as late as 2005 regarding his presence in a rectory. Another priest, who resigned in 2002 after being credibly accused of sexual abuse of a minor, performed a funeral in 2008, presenting himself as a "retired priest." Another prolific offender who left the Fall River Diocese in a cloud of scandal in 1964, celebrated the alumni Mass at St. Anselm College in 2007; though the Fall River Diocese had received complaints of sexual abuse from a dozen individuals, it never convened the Review Board, citing as a reason the fact that the priest's faculties had already been suspended at the time the complaints were received. A different priest, suspended in 2019, made arrangements to perform sacraments despite the suspension of his faculties within the diocese and, had another priest not intervened, would have publicly presented as a priest.

In the Springfield Diocese, we identified several instances post-2002 where individuals who were ostensibly removed from public ministry continued to serve, whether in actual priestly ministry or in other roles within the church. For example, in 2002, Springfield's diocesan chancellor learned that a priest who did not have faculties was saying Mass in one of its parishes. The priest was convicted in 1989 for the offense of "taking indecent liberties with children" when he served in a diocese in North Carolina; and records indicate that the Springfield Diocese knew this priest had been accused of sexually abusing eight grade-school aged boys going back to the 1960s. Just before the diocesan chancellor learned this priest was celebrating Mass in 2002, the Springfield Diocese had received a sexual abuse allegation from a survivor of this priest's conduct in the Springfield area in the late 1950s-early 1960s. When the chancellor spoke with another

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

priest in the area about why this priest was saying Mass, he was told that this priest filled in for other priests “all the time.”

Another priest from the Springfield Diocese, who was removed from public ministry in 2010 according to the diocese’s Credibly Accused List, was seen by his victim performing Mass at a local parish just one year later in 2011. After being removed from ministry, the offending priest also covered Mass on more than one occasion for another priest, who purportedly did not know about the offending priest’s removal from ministry. A Review Board member noticed that this same priest was slated to serve as the spiritual director of a retreat. When asked about this by the Review Board member, Bishop McDonnell indicated that it was the priest’s responsibility to back out of this obligation. Since the priest had not done so, Bishop McDonnell authorized the Review Board Chair to reach out to the retreat and inform them. The Review Board Chair also took it upon herself to reach out to the priest and inform him that he needed to resign from his obligations with the proper authorities. Had the bishop ensured compliance with the suspension order, rather than leaving that responsibility to the priest himself or later the Review Board Chair, this circumstance could have been avoided. This particular incident led to a discussion amongst Springfield’s Review Board members in 2012 concerning the fact that there was no one within the diocese who was accountable to follow up with the priests who had been removed from ministry. Now, more than ten years later, the issue persists.

Our investigation also uncovered instances in which the Springfield Diocese failed to respond when priests barred from public ministry nevertheless engaged in work within the diocese that still afforded them access to parishioners, including children. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, a priest from the St. Nicholas Ukrainian Catholic Eparchy began visiting and eventually moved into the Springfield Diocese. He began serving in a replacement capacity in some parishes, filling in for priests who were on leave, and, in 2002, was named an administrator of a parish. In late 2003, the Springfield Diocese was notified that the priest had been accused of molesting a minor in the 1970s and, appropriately, removed him from ministry. Within a few weeks, however, and without publicly disclosing the reason why the priest was no longer permitted to minister, the diocese nevertheless permitted him to serve as a parish organist. When Springfield’s clergy monitor began his duties in 2005, he learned of this and reported it to

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

the Director of the Office of Social Concern, Counseling and Prevention Services. The diocese determined that the priest could not, consistent with the *Dallas Norms*, be an organist in parishes and informed him that he could no longer serve in that capacity. Yet, by 2007, the priest was once again playing the organ in parishes within the Springfield Diocese. He also stopped cooperating with the clergy monitor and ultimately stopped seeing him entirely. At some point, the clergy monitor learned from the local pastor that he was having trouble with the priest as an employee. Yet, other than informing the pastor that the priest should not be working at the parish, the clergy monitor did nothing to ensure that this relationship ended and failed to notify either his supervisor at the time, the Vicar General, or the bishop. It was not until the spring of 2013, when another survivor of abuse at the hands of the same priest in the 1990s and early 2000s came forward, that the Office of Counseling, Prevention and Victim Services intervened. While there is some evidence that the diocese instructed the pastor to terminate the priest in the summer of 2013, payment records indicate that the parish continued to pay the priest until December 2013. For a decade after the adoption of the *Dallas Norms*, the Springfield Diocese was unwilling or unable to prevent an accused priest from serving within parishes in a capacity that allowed him access to children and took no steps to notify the public of the reason for the priest's suspension.

In another instance, a parish in the Springfield Diocese kept on as a coordinator of religious education a former seminarian accused of misconduct. In 2012, the diocese received an allegation that the seminarian committed sexual misconduct when he was a teenager and prior to his service with the diocese. After an investigation and a psychosexual risk assessment, the Review Board reported to the bishop in September 2013 its recommendation that the seminarian not return to the seminary or work in the church or in any church-related activity. While the seminarian was withdrawn from the seminary and was not supposed to engage in further ministry for at least a year (until a further suitability evaluation could be completed), it appears that the decision to remove him from ministry and church service was not communicated to the parish. As a result, he continued as a coordinator of religious education—despite the Review Board's recommendation—until May 2015.

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

D. Continued Lack of Transparency and Accountability

Lists of credibly accused clergy validate survivors who have reported abuse, encourage additional survivors to come forward by letting them know they were not the only ones abused by a particular priest, recognize the scope of the abuse problem, and promote transparency and accountability. They also help ensure that offending priests do not remain in ministry and that the procedures being used by the dioceses to root out child sexual abuse are working.

Yet the Worcester Diocese still has not published a list of credibly accused clergy. It is one of just twelve dioceses (or among the fewer than five percent of dioceses and orders) across the United States that have not published lists. It is the only diocese in Massachusetts that has not done so. During interviews we conducted as part of this investigation, we raised our concerns about Worcester's refusal to publish a credibly accused list. The diocese maintained it would be unfair to require only the Catholic Church to maintain such a list and, further, that it would tarnish the reputation of priests who were deceased at the time of the allegations and unable to defend themselves. The diocese underscored these points as recently as 2023 in a report on the extent of clergy child sexual abuse in Worcester. The diocese maintains that its transitory disclosure of credibly accused priests on the diocesan website and in the Catholic Free Press is sufficient. But these press announcements are made on a case-by-case basis, leaving victims and the public without means to systematically search for a particular abuser. Moreover, our investigation produced multiple examples of priests who retired or were administratively suspended due to a sexual abuse complaint and were the subject of additional abuse allegations during their retirement or suspension. In the case of retired priests, subsequent abuse allegations were never publicly disclosed. In the case of suspended priests, subsequent abuse allegations were not referenced in later press announcements regarding their laicization. One particularly troubling example stands out. A 2021 press release announcing the laicization of a Worcester priest noted that he "was removed from ministry in 1992 and in 1993 was convicted of soliciting a child to pose in a state of nudity." While true, this information omits the fact that since 2008, the diocese has received multiple reports that the priest committed serious acts of child sexual abuse (including rape) on boys as young as ten years old and that these allegations were deemed credible. Additionally, as the Chairperson of the Worcester Review Committee acknowledged,

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

the diocese does not publicize allegations against priests who were deceased when the diocese received the allegation. As documented earlier in this report, records we have reviewed indicate that over 200 survivors were abused at the hands of almost 90 perpetrators from the Worcester Diocese. As one survivor from the Worcester Diocese explained, he reported sexual abuse to the Worcester Diocese “to make certain that the legacy of his abuser was known, for closure, and to encourage others to come forward.”

While we commend the Dioceses of Fall River and Springfield for publishing lists of credibly accused clergy, our investigation has indicated those lists could be improved. In the Fall River Diocese, while the lists of priests credibly and publicly accused include a recitation of the assignments and present status (i.e., deceased, laicized, faculties restricted or removed) for each cleric, the information provided is quite limited, as compared to other dioceses’ versions of similar lists. Unlike the Archdiocese of Boston or the Diocese of Springfield, Fall River does not provide the dates of assignment at each parish. While the dates of some priests’ laicization are included, the status of others is described without any information regarding when faculties were removed or limited. Also, the list does not reference the dates on which the diocese was notified of a complaint of sexual abuse of a minor, or the timeframe of the credibly accused conduct.

In the Springfield Diocese, we saw a troubling example of exalting form over substance at the expense of a survivor, when it comes to which priests are included on its list of credibly accused clergy. In 2002, the survivor first reported repeated molestations by a priest to the Springfield Diocese. At the time, the Misconduct Commission (later reconstituted as the Review Board) thanked the survivor for coming forward and recognized her candor. Later, in 2008, the survivor also submitted a detailed questionnaire and was part of a civil settlement with the diocese. The diocese also paid the cost of her therapy for a number of years. Yet, when the diocese updated its list of credibly accused priests in June 2021, it did not include the name of the priest who abused her. The diocese’s explanation for the omission was that it was unable to find any document in which the Review Board specifically used the word “credible” to describe the survivor’s allegations. When this survivor came forward again in 2021 to correct the omission, the diocese requested that she go back through the Review Board process instead of reviewing its files and using the testimony from her first report in 2002 or her questionnaire from

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

2008, both of which outlined her abuse. Even after the media reported on the diocese's omission of the priest's name from its list and its retraumatizing treatment of the survivor, it took the diocese nearly one year to correct its omission and include the name of the priest on its Credibly Accused List. In addition, we noted that the Springfield Diocese also omitted from its Credibly Accused List the name of an order priest, who served in the diocese in the 1960s and is an admitted abuser of multiple boys. The priest was named in the New Hampshire Attorney General's 2003 Report on the Investigation of the Diocese of Manchester as having admitted to engaging in "inappropriate sexual contact with 4 or 5 minors [in the Springfield Diocese]."⁹⁷ The diocese was also involved in litigation that included allegations against this priest. Still, the Springfield Diocese has not included his name on its Credibly Accused List.

Creating and updating accurate Credibly Accused Lists promotes transparency and serves a number of important public safety purposes: alerting the church community of potential abusers, emboldening other survivors to come forward, and warning other dioceses of clergy who may seek to minister within their jurisdictions.

E. Religious Order Priests Continue to Fall Through the Cracks

Post-2002, religious order priests continue to serve in parishes in the dioceses, often indistinguishable to parishioners and the public from diocesan priests, but subject to a different hierarchy. See Section V(A)(9). In Springfield, as of 2023, when the diocese last updated its statistics, there were 41 religious order priests in the diocese, as compared to 114 active diocesan priests.⁹⁸ In Fall River, as of this writing, the diocese website reflects 73 religious order priests serving in the diocese, and 55 active diocesan priests. In Worcester, as of the most recent information available on its website, there are 60 religious order priests, while there are 109 active diocesan priests.

When allegations arise against order priests, they are not handled consistently, and there are gaps in communication between the dioceses and the orders. As Judge Velis observed in the report issued to the Diocese of Springfield in 2020, allegations of abuse against order priests and

⁹⁷ See New Hampshire Department of Justice, Office of Attorney General, *Investigation of the Diocese of Manchester*, 117 (2003), <https://www.doj.nh.gov/bureaus/criminal-justice-bureau/diocese-reports>.

⁹⁸ See Catholic Hierarchy: Diocese of Springfield in Massachusetts, <https://www.catholic-hierarchy.org/diocese/dspma.html>.

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

women religious “present[]...a myriad of problems that has developed in a parallel universe, operating independently, and not under any significant and meaningful method or ability of the Bishop to control, except his authority to suspend faculties within the diocese.” The report concludes that the current process for handling allegations of abuse against order priests is “clearly lacking.”

Among the three dioceses we examined, treatment of order priests is inconsistent. Generally speaking, the Dioceses of Fall River and Worcester staff told us that allegations against an order priest are referred to the priest’s order for review and adjudication and are not handled by the diocesan Review Boards, with the occasional exceptions of initial victim contact and assistance and referral to law enforcement. The Springfield Diocese appears to have adjudicated some order priest cases via its own Review Board, while others have been handled by the order.

We have not seen any efforts on behalf of diocese staff in the Worcester or Fall River Dioceses to learn whether the orders’ processes are adequate. In the Springfield Diocese, we have seen only limited work. In short, our investigation has not revealed any consistent efforts to ensure that orders practicing in a diocese have processes for handling allegations of child sexual abuse that are well-resourced, trauma-informed, or based in best practices. Nonetheless, the dioceses routinely send cases of sexual abuse allegations to religious orders and rely on them to make important factual determinations and safety evaluations.

The religious orders are of widely varied size and resources, and different orders have vastly different standards and policies. These differences have the potential to profoundly affect the experience of the involved parties, and even the outcome of the allegation. One order, for example, reported in recent years that it had no victim assistance coordinator at all, and relied entirely on the dioceses for any victim outreach. It was another order’s policy to offer pastoral care to a complainant only after an investigation was concluded. Another order articulated their Review Board’s standard of proof as higher than probable cause and closer to the criminal standard of beyond a reasonable doubt. Yet another order was so strapped for resources, it opted to use its allocated Nigerian mission fund to pay the criminal defense attorney it hired for an accused member. Larger and better resourced orders, by contrast, have implemented

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

comprehensive safety plans for their credibly accused members that strictly regulate their movements and are reviewed on a regular basis.

Occasionally, an order priest may appear to be treated with more leniency and less care than a diocese's policy would suggest for its own priests. In 2007, for example, an order priest was credibly accused of kissing an eight-year-old girl on the lips at a social engagement and was criminally charged with the conduct. The bishop of Fall River asked the order to prohibit the priest from leaving the friary and prevent him from having access to minors. Nine months later, the priest admitted in court that there were sufficient facts to find him guilty on the criminal charge and received a continuation without a finding. One week after this, while the priest was just beginning his criminal probation, his order requested that the bishop partially restore the priest's faculties, allowing him to publicly celebrate Mass. Without the assistance of a Review Board, Bishop Coleman agreed and granted him partial faculties in the diocese. Just over one year later, at a family's party, the priest was accused of trying to force his tongue into the mouth of a 14-year-old girl, in front of a witness, as the girl resisted. The family was unaware of the prior criminal charges against the cleric when they invited him to the event.

Recordkeeping by the dioceses as to religious order priests serving within them varies widely, with some keeping files on such priests and some not. We have not seen any evidence, however, that a diocese ever receives a personnel file on an order priest serving in one of its parishes. Our investigation revealed, for example, the 2008 placement of an order priest with a history of allegations in the Fall River Diocese; but we found no evidence to suggest that the order ever informed the diocese of the past allegations against him. Such failures to communicate have the potential to create situations where a priest is inadequately supervised, or where a future allegation is unfairly doubted.

We have seen the supervision of credibly accused order priests fall through the cracks between the orders and dioceses as well. In one notable example from 2008, an order priest who had served in the Fall River Diocese was convicted of rape. A few months after his conviction, the diocese learned that the priest was living in a local friary without its knowledge or approval. The bishop of Fall River wrote to the priest's superior, complaining that the order had not notified the diocese of the priest's presence in the local parish, where the priest

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

previously had served and was well-known. The bishop noted that there had been complaints that the priest had been seen in and around the parish rectory and observed that the priest's presence in the area posed the risk of "scandal."

Inconsistencies in the handling of complaints amongst varied religious orders, as well as failures of communication and coordination between the orders and the dioceses, have the potential to create, and have created, concerning and unsafe situations in the dioceses.

F. Lack of Authority and Independence of Review Boards

When it was promulgated in June 2002, the *Dallas Charter* required each diocese to establish a Review Board to advise the bishop on how to handle reports of sexual abuse, determine clergy fitness for ministry, and regularly review diocesan policies and procedures for responding to sexual abuse complaints.⁹⁹ The *Dallas Charter* and *Essential Norms* require that Review Boards consist of a minimum of five lay persons not in the employ of the dioceses, who will serve for a term of five years.¹⁰⁰

An independent committee of laypeople serving as an advisory panel for the bishops was heralded as a third-party voice within the church, and a solution to the abusive and secretive practices of the previous decades. But Review Boards only have the power to advise the bishop and make recommendations for the resolution of a particular case. They are an advisory council and not the ultimate arbiter of any sexual abuse complaint. Even if a Review Board decides a complaint is credible, the bishop may reject the Review Board's recommendation and handle the matter as he sees fit.

⁹⁹ *Dallas Charter*, Article 2: "This board is to advise the diocesan/eparchial bishop in his assessment of allegations of sexual abuse of minors and in his determination of a cleric's suitability for ministry. It is regularly to review diocesan/eparchial policies and procedures for dealing with sexual abuse of minors. Also, the board can review these matters both retrospectively and prospectively and give advice on all aspects of responses in connection with these cases."

¹⁰⁰ *Essential Norms*, Norm 5: "The review board, established by the diocesan/eparchial bishop, will be composed of at least five persons of outstanding integrity and good judgment in full communion with the Church. The majority of the review board members will be lay persons who are not in the employ of the diocese/eparchy; but at least one member should be a priest who is an experienced and respected pastor of the diocese/eparchy in question, and at least one member should have particular expertise in the treatment of the sexual abuse of minors. The members will be appointed for a term of five years, which can be renewed. It is desirable that the Promoter of Justice participate in the meetings of the review board."

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

Review Board members are exclusively appointed by the bishop, and only the bishop has the power to dismiss them. Despite the *Dallas Charter's* requirement that Review Board members sit for five-year terms, in the dioceses we examined, the Attorney General's investigation found that many Review Board members, including top church aides, were appointed by bishops and served for terms that stretched for decades. In Worcester, for example, six members of the Review Committee have served for the past twenty years. In Fall River, a handful of members served nearly continuous terms from the Review Board's inception in the 1990s until its reorganization in 2020.

In the Worcester Diocese, the bishop is present at most Review Board meetings, including for credibility determinations. The same was often true in the Fall River Diocese until its Review Board reorganization in 2020.¹⁰¹ Before the 2020 reorganization, members of the Fall River Review Board complained about the bishop's overinvolvement in the process. One former diocesan employee expressed concern that this dynamic left members vulnerable to trying to please the bishop, rather than exercising their own independent judgment. In the Worcester Diocese, Review Board members noted that the bishop actually provided input during credibility determinations. The presence or involvement of the most senior official in the diocese in assessing sexual abuse complaints can have a silencing effect on board members who might otherwise be inclined to voice their disagreements with the diocese's assessment or handling of a particular allegation.

In the Fall River Diocese, we uncovered widespread evidence that the bishop avoided consulting the Review Board on many sexual abuse allegations. A high-level employee of the Fall River Diocese told us that only a fraction of the complaints of sexual abuse the diocese received were presented to the Board. She described a process by which, in lieu of submitting allegations of child sexual abuse to the Review Board, the bishop resolved many allegations by meeting with a small group that included her, the Vicar General, and diocesan attorneys. One Review Board member noted that during his nearly thirty years on the Board, he recalled seeing news stories about accused Fall River Diocese priests who, to his knowledge, had not been before the Board.

¹⁰¹ As part of related changes in the Fall River Diocese, the bishop is no longer present during credibility determinations. However, in the Worcester Diocese, the bishop remains present during these determinations.

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

When the Fall River Diocese released its list of credibly accused priests in January 2021, he saw names of priests on the list who had not been before him on the Review Board. The Fall River bishop's decision to bypass the Review Board resulted in a lack of consistency in the diocese's treatment of accused priests. Some priests were subjected to the scrutiny of the Review Board and the relatively more public disclosure that entailed, with the bishop's announcement of the allegation in the parish bulletin. Others, for reasons we were not able to determine, had similar allegations disposed of—typically favorably—by the small group of diocesan insiders who screened incoming abuse allegations. On another occasion, in 2014, the Vicar General reportedly ordered a contracted investigator to halt his investigation into a sexual abuse complaint, despite the investigator's preliminary finding that the allegation was credible. The complaint was not referred to the Review Board for another five years, during which time the priest remained in ministry without restriction.

Because Review Boards are granted the responsibility under the *Dallas Charter* to advise bishops on accused priests' suitability for continued ministry, their decision-making impacts public safety, and they require the materials necessary to effectively meet that responsibility. In the post-2002 period, however, the bishops of the Worcester and Fall River Dioceses have not reliably provided their Review Boards with all relevant documents and information.¹⁰² Our investigation revealed that Review Boards did not consistently receive complete personnel files, including prior allegations of sexual abuse, and psychiatric evaluations for accused priests, at least not without a special request. In Worcester and Fall River (prior to its 2020 Review Board reorganization), the dioceses did not regularly make available written victim statements and investigator reports. In Fall River, prior to 2020, requests for materials were not always granted (or handled consistently). Until 2020 in Fall River, and continuing to this day in Worcester, the Review Boards frequently make credibility determinations by relying on oral reports from the dioceses and the Victim Assistance Coordinator because pertinent documents are not consistently available.

¹⁰² The Fall River Diocese policies described in this section are those in place from 2002-2020. For a detailed description of the written policies of the Fall River Diocese post-2020. See Sections X(A)(3)-(4).

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

Compounding these issues is the practice of filtering evidence and testimony through the lens of the bishop, the bishop's delegate, or a contracted investigator hired by the bishop to conduct the initial investigation, who makes an oral report of his or her findings to the Review Board. In all three dioceses that are the subject of this investigation, sexual abuse investigations are reported to the Review Boards by the bishop's delegate or designated investigator. In Worcester, and until 2020 in Fall River, these reports are only oral. These reports include a credibility assessment of both the complaint and of the complainant. The investigation uncovered at least one example of an allegation in the Springfield Diocese that was found unsubstantiated because the investigator reported that the witnesses, while "credible," had conflicting stories. Allowing investigators appointed by the bishop to make underlying credibility determinations undermines the purpose of the Review Boards, which are supposed to assess credibility on their own. In the Worcester Diocese, the bishop or his delegate interviews accused clergy about sexual abuse allegations; the results of those interviews and any statements or admissions made by the accused are orally reported to the Review Board. This was also true in many cases heard by the Fall River Review Board until its reorganization in 2020. This crucial investigative step is thus entirely controlled by the bishop or his delegate, who are free to choose whether and to what extent to report information obtained during these interviews to the Review Boards.

Ultimately, Review Boards assessing sexual abuse allegations are only as effective as the information the bishops give to them. In the Fall River and Worcester Dioceses, the bishops' repeated failure to consult the Review Boards on cases or fully share information with their members has limited the ability to adequately deal with sexual abuse complaints. It also ensures that only the bishop and select church insiders are aware of the full scope of the clergy sexual abuse problem in the dioceses. Moreover, in Fall River, because the Review Board heard only a subset of cases prior to 2020, its members were not aware of the systemic problems that contributed to the persistence of child sexual abuse. Such gatekeeping prevents Review Boards from fulfilling their responsibilities under the *Dallas Charter* and ultimately undermines the authority and independence of these boards.

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

G. Lack of Clear and Consistent Standards for Credibility Determinations

The *Dallas Charter* and *Essential Norms* do not provide definitions or standards for assessing the credibility of allegations of child sexual abuse. Norm 4 merely includes “[a]dvising the diocesan bishop/eparch in his assessment of allegations of sexual abuse of minors . . .” among the duties of the Review Board.¹⁰³ This leaves each diocesan bishop, in consultation with his appointed Review Board, to decide for himself what it means for a priest to be “credibly accused” in any particular diocese. All three dioceses that are the subject of this investigation apply different standards to determine credibility of sexual abuse allegations. The lack of clear standards for credibility determinations risks inconsistent and disparate treatment of allegations.

In the Worcester Diocese, no Review Committee member we spoke with was able to articulate how they assess credibility of allegations. Members of the Review Committee stated that an allegation is generally deemed credible if the information about the priest’s identity, assignment, and location of the abuse contained in the victim’s report can be verified through the priest’s file and parish records. Different factors, such as prior allegations against the accused priest, corroboration, and “gut instinct,” can affect the credibility finding, but there is no requirement that these factors be considered. Some Review Committee members we spoke with agreed that credibility is generally found unanimously without even holding a formal vote. Others insisted that a formal vote was taken.

In the Springfield Diocese, recent revisions to the policies and procedures left it with two seemingly conflicting standards for determining the credibility of sexual abuse allegations. When the diocese updated its Credibly Accused List in June 2021, it announced that it was using a standard of “reasonable cause to believe that the sexual abuse occurred,” which it likened to probable cause. In September 2021, the Task Force report used a similar definition. However, in the revised Review Board by-laws from July 2021, the diocese appears to be using a “preponderance of the evidence” standard. Such a disparate set of standards within the same organization is confusing and may result in different standards being used for victims’ allegations based on factors unrelated to the abuse, such as the time when they came forward.

¹⁰³ Essential Norms, Norm 4(a).

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

The Fall River Diocese applies a standard similar to Springfield's "reasonable cause" standard, evaluating credibility of allegations, "using a standard of proof approximating probable cause," which the law generally defines as reasonably likely to be true. Though the diocese's Ministerial Review Board policy outlines this standard, there is some confusion among Review Board members as to what it means, and whether the testimony of a single victim could be sufficient to establish that an allegation of sexual abuse was credible. Along these lines, one church official described a case in which a priest was alleged to have sexually assaulted a young adult seminarian. Though the official told us that he believed the victim, who, he said, had no reason to lie, nothing was done because it was "he said, he said," and they "couldn't get any corroboration."

Corroborating evidence in cases of decades-old sexual abuse is hard to find. Moreover, we saw cases where even corroborated allegations were deemed not credible by diocesan Review Boards. For example, an individual contacted the Fall River Diocese in 2017 and described abuse he had suffered as a camper at the diocese's Cathedral Camp in the 1970s. When he spoke to the diocese's Victim Assistance Coordinator, he identified a third party, a former seminarian who worked at the camp, who had witnessed some of the accused's inappropriate behavior. The diocese reached out to the former seminarian, who did in fact corroborate the accused's inappropriate behavior at camp, which included watching the boys shower and commenting on their genitalia, massaging campers, "zeroing in" on long-term campers, and taking them camping in the state forest. The former seminarian also described the victim "hiding out" in the stables to avoid his abuser. One diocesan employee, charged with investigating the initial allegation, told us she believed the initial allegation to be credible and urged the bishop to remove the priest from ministry. However, despite this initial credibility determination and the corroboration from a third party, the diocese nevertheless took no action to limit the priest's ministry and Bishop da Cunha refused to allow the diocesan employee to interview the priest. Instead, the bishop met with the priest personally and accepted his flat denial of the allegations without convening the Review Board, allowing the priest to remain in active ministry until the diocese's re-examination of the allegations in 2019. The priest was suspended after the 2019 review, and the bishop publicly announced the suspension. Following the announcement, two additional victims came

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

forward with eerily similar stories of the priest's abuse, spanning nearly two decades.¹⁰⁴ In 2021, the Review Board deemed the allegations credible and the bishop barred the priest from ministry.

In some cases, it appears that a law enforcement agency's decision not to proceed with a criminal case may have influenced diocesan decisions to take no action against an accused priest. This type of diocesan decision-making relies on a false assumption—particularly in child sexual abuse investigations, because a law enforcement decision not to proceed is typically based on whether there is admissible evidence likely to establish each element of the allegation beyond a reasonable doubt. This is a much stricter standard and a different analysis than the determination that Review Boards are trying to make in assessing whether there is credible evidence to justify restricting the faculties of a priest who presents a risk to children. Additionally, many clergy abuse cases are reported to law enforcement decades after the fact and cannot be prosecuted because they are barred by the statute of limitations. The lack of prosecution of these cases has absolutely nothing to do with the credibility of the victim or strength of the evidence.

H. Insufficient Education and Training of Review Board Members and Lack of Victim Support

By failing to use trauma-informed best practices, the dioceses may be effectively suppressing the number of credible findings of abuse, and harming survivors in the process. Historically, across all three dioceses, Review Board members and other personnel involved in the investigative process have had little to no trauma training or experience in investigating child sexual abuse.¹⁰⁵ In order to effectively investigate allegations of child sexual abuse, communicate with abuse survivors, and assess the credibility of allegations, all diocesan staff involved in these tasks should be trained in the effects of trauma and adopt a trauma-informed approach to their work. Trauma can profoundly affect a multitude of aspects of a survivor's narrative. Some examples of these effects include delay in disclosing abuse, difficulty recalling detail peripheral

¹⁰⁴ Here, again, we see evidence that the diocese policy of limiting public knowledge of complaints may have had the effect of silencing other victims, who might have come forward if they realized they were not alone.

¹⁰⁵ We note that the Fall River Diocese began providing trauma education to staff and Review Board members at some point after its 2020 reorganization of the Ministerial Review Board. The policies and practices described here are those that existed within the diocese from 2002 until 2020.

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

to the abuse, and a numb or “flat” affect while recounting traumatic events. As a result, a survivor’s behavior and statements may not follow the traditional indications of credibility assessments. Those untrained in the myriad impacts of trauma may misread these cues as indicative of a lack of credibility on the part of the survivor, rather than the very real result of the trauma. For example, oftentimes victims of sexual abuse do not remember events in a linear, chronological order or recall secondary details. Instead, their memories are often focused on those details that presented the most significant threat to their well-being at the time of the incident, such as the weapon the perpetrator was holding, rather than the color of the vehicle driven by the perpetrator.

The interview of the victim is a critical step in the dioceses’ investigations into sexual abuse allegations. The quality of the interview determines whether the allegation is found credible, whether and to what extent the diocese will offer care, compensation, or treatment to the victim, and what actions the bishop will take regarding the accused priest’s future ministry. Interviewing practices employed by investigators without requisite trauma training can interfere with the truth-finding process and lead to inaccurate assessments of allegations. The result can be an investigation that ends with unjust outcomes for victims and a potential abuser staying in ministry without restrictions.

The Attorney General’s investigation produced evidence that, contrary to best practices for conducting child sexual abuse investigations, diocesan investigators relied heavily on survivors’ ability to recall exact dates of abuse in making credibility determinations. In the Worcester Diocese, when recording details of a victim’s allegation, the Victim Assistance Coordinator typically asks the victim for the name of the accused priest, the parish in which the priest worked, and the year in which the abuse occurred. The Victim Assistance Coordinator then checks the priest’s assignment card to determine whether it reflects that the priest was at the parish at the time the reported abuse occurred. The Victim Assistance Coordinator has described this record check as the “hallmark” of credibility. Consequently, survivor accounts were discredited when Review Board members found discrepancies between the date of the abuse reported by the victim to the investigator and the priest’s assignment card, or when the victim inaccurately recounted the color of the car the priest was driving when the abuse occurred. This

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

approach is inconsistent with trauma-informed best practices for evaluating the credibility of victims in sexual abuse investigations and has led to allegations being found unsubstantiated.

In the Fall River Diocese, for example, a victim contacted the diocese to report abuse he suffered at the hands of a diocesan priest in a rectory and in the priest's cottage. When asked for the date on which the abuse began, the victim was able only to state that it coincided with his receipt of the sacrament of First Communion, which children typically receive at around age seven. In its initial investigation of the complaint, the Fall River Diocese noted that the accused priest was not assigned to the parish where the abuse allegedly occurred during the year the victim would have received that sacrament. The investigator hired by the diocese interviewed the accused cleric and the priest with whom he shared the cottage. Based on these interviews, in which both men flatly denied the allegations, as well as the discrepancy in dates, the investigators concluded that the allegation was unsubstantiated. A subsequent look at the claim in 2021 revealed diocesan records showing that the victim had received First Communion not at age seven, but at age thirteen, at which point the accused priest was, in fact, pastor at the parish. Reviewing the claim—along with the report of the new investigative firm hired by the Fall River Diocese—resulted in a unanimous finding that the allegation was credible.

We have also seen examples, even in the past fifteen years, of investigators and Review Board members mistaking common consequences of child sexual abuse, such as substance use disorder, homelessness, criminal records, or difficulty with authority, as indicative of a lack of credibility and thus a basis for finding an allegation to be unfounded. In the Fall River Diocese, we saw a report compiled by a third-party investigator hired by the diocese to investigate an allegation of sexual abuse, in which the investigator contrasted the personal history of the victim with that of the accused to support a conclusion that the allegation was unsubstantiated. The report lacked any insight into the possibility that some of the very bases for discrediting the complaint may themselves be fallout from childhood sexual abuse: substance use, alcoholism, and psychiatric diagnoses.

Knowledge of the effects of trauma is essential to conducting an effective interview of a sexual abuse survivor. Even prior to asking a single question about the abuse, elements such as the location of the interview or seating arrangement, or the choice to spend extra time building

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

rapport, can significantly affect the amount and quality of information an investigator may receive. In the Worcester Diocese, victims described interviews that were conducted over the telephone and without the opportunity to meet with the Victim Assistance Coordinator or members of the Review Committee in person. Experts in the interviewing of victims and witnesses regarding sensitive and traumatic matters rarely conduct such interviews over the telephone, where appropriate rapport is difficult to establish. Similarly, in the Springfield Diocese, victims described how interview locations selected by the investigator were triggering. The investigator's car, for example, may not be the best location for interviewing a survivor who remembers going for car rides with his abuser.

Trauma training is also critical to managing survivors' expectations during and after the adjudicative process, which can itself be a source of trauma. For instance, in the Fall River Diocese, one victim described becoming physically ill after learning in late 2019 that the priest who abused him nearly two decades earlier had been placed on administrative leave. Though he had been in touch with the Fall River Diocese regarding the abuse in 2006, he learned of the priest's suspension not from the diocese, but from a family friend who had read about it in the local newspaper.

We note that the dioceses have made progress in this area. Four members of the Worcester Diocese's Review Board are now trained therapists, including a practicing pediatrician who specializes in childhood trauma and has previously provided trainings to the board. In addition, Worcester's Victim Assistance Coordinator, who is responsible for conducting interviews with victims, is a licensed social worker, albeit with no prior training or experience in child abuse investigations. However, trauma training should be a mandatory requirement for the Victim Assistance Coordinator and all Diocesan Review Committee members.

Prior to our investigation, a third-party investigator the Fall River Diocese regularly employed to interview survivors and opine on credibility had no prior child abuse experience and no training in the effects of trauma. As recently as 2019, a high-level diocesan employee, tasked with handling some of the internal processes relating to clergy sexual abuse, had no trauma education. During an interview with the Attorney General's Office, he expressed his own surprise at having been called to serve in that role, noting that his primary qualification, in his own

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

estimate, was that he was “trustworthy”—someone the bishop could entrust with sensitive information without fear that it would be disseminated. When asked what training he had received to enable him to serve in his role within the chancery staff, he pointed to a single conference he attended, which was sponsored by the Catholic and lay treatment centers to which the Church historically sent its sexually predatory priests. He expressed concern that these institutions were “selling their services” to dioceses for priests struggling with depression, addiction, and sexual abuse, a circumstance he acknowledged was “a little off-putting.”

During the pendency of our investigation and after we raised this concern with the Diocese, Fall River’s Ministerial Review Board and other staff with similar responsibilities began receiving training on the effects of trauma. While such training was previously not regularly mandated or offered for Board members, in 2023, an update to the Ministerial Review Board policy newly required that continuing education in “trauma, abuse dynamics, and/or best practices in abuse and misconduct investigations” must be provided to Board members at least once annually. We are encouraged by the Fall River Diocese’s new requirement regarding trauma education for the Board, though due to its recent adoption, we cannot yet evaluate its consistent execution.

In its 2021 report, the Springfield Diocese’s Task Force emphasized the importance of diocese staff being trauma-informed. Yet, at that time, the diocese did not provide new members of the Review Board with training on the effects of trauma. Whether the Task Force’s report is translated into action and the appropriate staff receives trauma training remains to be seen.

I. Conflicts of Interest

All three dioceses still struggle with conflicts of interest in the roles of their Safe Environment staff, who work for the dioceses but perform victim support as part of their role. Traditionally, victim support professionals are trained to advocate for victims and help ensure that services and protections are afforded to them. They serve a critical function in providing information, support, and assistance to victims of crime. Best practices dictate that the process of assisting the victim and obtaining information from the victim should be separated so that the victim can receive proper care. Yet we observed that the responsibilities of the victim support staff are often intertwined with the investigative process.

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

For example, in the Worcester Diocese, the Victim Assistance Coordinator is responsible for both caring for the victim's well-being and investigating the victim's allegation. Although the Victim Assistance Coordinator's role is to serve as an advocate for victims during the reporting process—ensuring that victims receive adequate services, support, and compensation from the diocese—she is also involved in interviewing the victim and sometimes the accused clergy member, compiling diocesan records regarding the accused clergy member which are used to substantiate the victim's allegation, and reporting her initial determination regarding the credibility of the victim's allegation to the committee. Similarly, in Fall River, prior to our investigation, personnel who were tasked with a primary role of victim support also actively participated in investigations and credibility assessments. This dual role presents an obvious conflict of interest.

Too often, victims are unaware of this conflict. This creates inherent confusion or tension for survivors who may not know who they can trust. The result is that victims who reported allegations to Review Boards believed the investigations into their allegations were biased or otherwise conducted in a manner designed to protect the diocese.

In the Fall River diocese, we spoke with one survivor who expressed confusion and frustration that a diocesan staff member characterized herself as independent and “not on anyone's side.” “I don't think she made it clear she was working for the church,” the victim explained to us. Her experience was of someone who was supportive and friendly while asking detailed questions about the abuse, but whose affect changed dramatically after getting the information she needed. Another survivor who worked with a different staff member at the diocese described feeling as though the staff member was “on [his] side” during an initial conversation but felt betrayed when the staff member later conducted “quite aggressive” interviews with witnesses whose names the survivor had provided. A third survivor recounted a staff member in the late 2000s telling him not to talk about the abuse he endured, framing it as advice for his own benefit. “The best way for this to go away is not to talk about it,” he recalls the staff member telling him. “She was as curious to get my story as she was to protect his,” the survivor told us.

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

We also observed bishops acting in some cases in the role of investigator, questioning accused priests about the allegations before them. In so doing, the bishop steps into the tenuous position of being both the employer of the accused and the untrained investigator into the cleric's possible sexual misconduct. Moreover, even when the Review Board is called upon to weigh a particular allegation, the bishop remains the ultimate arbiter of any accusation, making his foray into the investigation even more fraught with conflict.

Each diocese is, at its core, a very small community. It was not uncommon for a Review Board member to have had a prior relationship with an accused cleric, whether as a parishioner, a fellow seminarian, or a colleague. Yet, until our investigation raised this as a concern, none of the three dioceses had a policy for recusal based on a conflict of interest. The Fall River Diocese has since that time implemented a conflict-of-interest policy for its Ministerial Review Board. As of this writing, however, the Worcester and Springfield Dioceses have not.

In Fall River, as of 2021, multiple current and former Review Board members told us that there are no circumstances in which a Review Board member must recuse himself from a case based on his relationship with the accused priest. Indeed, we heard from multiple Board and staff members involved in the process that such connections have not precluded their participation in cases. In one example, a former diocesan employee tasked with investigating the initial allegations shared that one accused priest was a close personal friend of hers. Another former diocesan official recounted his involvement in an allegation made against a cleric who was, at the time, his own curate.

In the absence of express policies regarding conflict of interest, the dioceses rely instead on an ad hoc system of self-regulation to avoid conflicts or even the appearance of conflict. In the Springfield Diocese, we saw the conflict-of-interest problem arise in a different context. In May 2020, in anticipation of the release of the Velis report, the diocese announced the formation of the Independent Task Force on the Response to Sexual Abuse within the Diocese of Springfield, a ten-member task force tasked with developing a strategic plan with specific steps to improve the diocese's response to allegations of sexual abuse. Daniel J. Ford, a retired Massachusetts Superior Court Judge, was appointed the Chairman. However, in May of 2021, a year after the group began its work and only a few months before they released their report, Judge Ford

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

resigned as chair of the Task Force acknowledging the appearance of a possible conflict of interest. According to media reports, Judge Ford submitted his resignation to avoid any appearance of conflict of interest or bias based on a paid legal consultant job that he had undertaken with Egan, Flanagan, and Cohen, PC, the law firm that represents the Diocese of Springfield. Judge Ford was quoted in the article as saying, “While my work with the law firm did not constitute a conflict of interest as prescribed by legal standards, in discussing this matter with task force members, it became clear to me that members of the group did have concerns. In recognition of that feedback and given the sensitivity of the subject matter being considered, even the appearance of a conflict had the potential of compromising the credibility of the task force’s work.”

Failing to create and enforce policies that address conflicts of interest impairs the dioceses’ ability to fairly and objectively investigate and adjudicate allegations of child sexual abuse. It also serves as an obstacle to the transparency and accountability that survivors deserve.

In 2023, the Fall River Diocese issued a revised Ministerial Review Board Policy that incorporates this recommendation and provides that the diocese will adopt and comply with a conflict-of-interest policy. The diocese’s 2025 Ministerial Review Board policy contains this provision, which requires members to disclose “any actual, potential, or perceived conflicts of interest” to the Chair, permits their voluntary recusal. It gives the bishop the ultimate authority to determine whether a member’s participation would create a conflict or the appearance of a conflict and to determine whether the member may participate if they elect not to voluntarily recuse.

Having spent decades covering up widespread child sexual abuse, the dioceses must demonstrate to survivors and the public that they are committed to holding priests who committed such serious crimes accountable for their actions and to protecting children from future abuse. Full transparency requires dealing with both actual and perceived conflicts of interest and is crucial to establishing the public’s trust in the processes now being used by the dioceses to investigate allegations of sexual abuse.

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

J. Failure to Identify Grooming Behavior and Other Conduct Falling Short of Child Sexual Abuse

All three dioceses struggle with how to address grooming and inappropriate behaviors that do not rise to the level of sexual touching. We have seen instances in which the dioceses receive reports of patterns of a priest's inappropriate behavior, such as dogged pursuit of time alone with children, hugging, wrestling, or massaging that makes children uncomfortable, or inappropriately questioning children about sexual topics, particularly during the sacrament of Confession. These reports, when not accompanied with information about physical sexual touching, are frequently dismissed without additional action or evaluation. Relatedly, we observed that when allegations are made regarding a priest's sexual relationship with a young adult, the diocese typically views the issue as a failure of celibacy on the part of the priest and a relationship between consenting adults, without any true examination of whether the priest engaged in grooming or other inappropriate behavior that fell short of sexual abuse while the individual was still a minor.

For example, in 2022 the Worcester Diocese received a report that a young priest was developing "boundary issues" with a minor in his parish. The diocese initially determined that this behavior did not cross the line into sexual abuse. The offending priest was scheduled to be reassigned to a new parish with a more experienced senior priest who could provide more guidance to him. Later, when the victim reported that the priest had in fact indecently touched the victim, the diocese immediately took all appropriate steps, placed the priest on leave, and notified law enforcement authorities and the Department of Children and Families. Until it reached that point, however, diocesan officials failed to recognize the priest's conduct as an escalating sequence of boundary violations that could cause significant harm to the victim. This incident also underscores that the Worcester Diocese should take steps to specifically address escalating boundary violations and other aspects of grooming.

Similarly, in 2011, the Springfield Diocese identified one of its priests as having boundary issues. The diocese viewed the conduct as the actions of a young priest who was just trying to fit in with the children. The matter was handled informally at first, with the priest's superiors talking to him about proper boundaries, and no formal action was taken by the diocese. Another priest was concerned about the lack of action on the part of the diocese and brought the matter to the

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

attention of the Review Board, which conducted an investigation and reached the same conclusion as the diocese. However, in 2018, a second set of boundary issues—more serious than the first, yet still not rising to the level of physical sexual abuse—arose concerning the same priest. This time, the priest was sent for treatment and removed from ministry when he failed to comply with the treatment requirements.

In 2020, the Fall River Diocese adopted a new policy that addresses grooming behaviors and tasks the Ministerial Review Board with hearing allegations of sexual misconduct that fall short of physical sexual abuse. We are encouraged that the diocese has codified a response to complaints that it did not adequately address in the past. At the time of this writing, the Fall River Diocese's code of conduct for priests, last updated in June of 2025, also includes provisions to address grooming behaviors. These include restrictions on gifts, electronic communications, and physical contact. We hope that red flags like massaging children's shoulders and calling and texting teens will indeed merit an investigation into potential grooming behavior that may, in some circumstances, prevent future sexual abuse of minors.

Additionally, though training in the Fall River Diocese has improved substantially over time, we have significant concerns about the failure to root out an ingrained "old boys' network" culture amongst the priests within the diocese. When we asked one longtime priest about his understanding of what constitutes grooming, he appeared unsure, describing it as "set[ting] your eyes on someone, take you for an ice cream." He backtracked and explained that where a priest has a relationship with a boy, "there's also occasions where you're gonna take someone for an ice cream," and indicated that such behavior would not seem to be grooming unless there was not a prior relationship. This response was particularly troubling, because the goal of the early stages of a perpetrator's grooming is precisely to build a one-on-one relationship with a child, so that spending time with him or her alone would seem normal to the child. When the same priest was asked what he would do if he saw a colleague engaging in grooming behavior with a young boy, he said he would "pull the guy aside," and tell him that if there was more to his motivation than just "taking [the boy] for ice cream," he needs to get help. Such informal attempts to "pull [a] guy aside" rely on the statements of the potential perpetrator, do not create a record, do not

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

protect the safety of the potential victim, and, in short, are no substitute for a formal intervention.

By acting only when conduct rises to the level of physical sexual abuse, the dioceses miss important warning signs. Grooming behavior must be taken seriously, as it can point the way to either ongoing sexual abuse or a priest engaging in escalating conduct which may rise to sexual abuse in the future. We commend the Fall River Diocese for its policy change to address this issue and encourage all three dioceses to continue to work toward education, training, and a cultural shift to recognize and report these behaviors as a means of protecting children.

K. Failure to Act on Anonymous or Third-Party Allegations

According to guidelines developed by the Massachusetts Legislative Task Force on the Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse in 2017, the standard best practice in many organizations is to establish a hotline administered by a third party to receive anonymous allegations of sexual misconduct or abuse. Many victims of sexual abuse remain silent rather than report their abuse because they fear the repercussions of coming forward. Anonymous or blind reporting offers such victims a way to safely file a report. Anonymous reporting is also an important tool in preventing future abuse. It allows for the organization to collect helpful information about repeat offenders and their patterns of behavior, which can be used to catch serial sexual predators before they abuse additional victims.

According to a canon law expert, the Holy See instructs bishops to report even anonymous allegations to the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith (“CDF”), a group of senior officials at the Vatican, for adjudication. Yet, all three dioceses that are the subject of this investigation have failed at times to act on anonymous complaints of sexual abuse or complaints from third parties. Our investigation revealed that the dioceses, at times, did not interview accused priests regarding anonymous allegations or inquire of diocesan staff or parishioners in the parishes where the alleged abuse took place. Instead, these obvious potential sources of information are categorically not pursued. Anonymous allegations are also sometimes not documented in the personnel files of accused priests. In certain cases, the failure to document these allegations led Review Boards or diocesan officials who were reviewing accusations of sexual abuse made

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

against the same priests years later to believe that the priests had never before been accused of sexual abuse, when in fact it was not the first-time allegations had been made.

For example, in 2002, the Springfield Diocese's Review Board was contacted by a survivor of adult sexual assault who wished to remain anonymous. The Review Board heard from him but declined to present the case to the accused priest or investigate further because of the survivor's desired anonymity. Several years later, in 2010, the survivor came forward again, this time ready to attach his name to the complaint. The Review Board found the allegation credible, but by then the priest had retired. In the intervening years, the diocese issued at least three letters of suitability attesting to the priest's good moral character, including one letter that attested to there being no accusations of sexual misconduct or impropriety made against him.

In Fall River, a woman contacted the diocese in 2010 and informed them that she had witnessed a priest molest her twelve-year-old son a decade earlier. The diocese reached out to the victim, by then twenty-one years old, who declined to be interviewed by the Review Board. The Review Board heard the matter and noted the victim's refusal to speak to the investigator, but nevertheless recommended that the bishop remove the priest from ministry. The bishop took no action at all until 2012, when he suspended the priest's faculties not because of the allegation against him, but because his homilies, which were critical of the bishop and the United States government, were deemed heretical. As of the reconstitution of its Ministerial Review Board in 2020, the Fall River Diocese indicates that its official policy is now to investigate anonymous and third-party complaints. We commend this policy change, though over the course of the investigation were not able to meaningfully evaluate its execution.

L. Failure to Consistently Document Investigations into Child Abuse

Reliable document retention and file management practices are essential components of effective clergy child sexual abuse prevention and response systems. Poor recordkeeping can and has led directly to further harm of children. The Attorney General's investigation revealed that the Dioceses of Worcester and Fall River have not adhered to a consistent or reliable method of internal recordkeeping sufficient to document allegations of clergy child sexual abuse, the ensuing investigations, or the basis of Review Board conclusions or recommendations regarding these allegations.

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

Under the *Dallas Charter* and canon law, all dioceses are required to document internal investigations into clergy sexual abuse allegations involving minors. The *Essential Norms* mandate that a diocese's internal policies and procedures "comply fully with, and...specify in more detail, the steps to be taken in implementing the requirements of canon law, particularly...canons 1717-1719."¹⁰⁶ Those canons require that, after an initial inquiry into an allegation of sexual abuse of a minor, a bishop must document the beginning and completion of an internal investigation. Those canons also mandate preservation of the records which reflect a diocese's investigation. The Vatican's guidance for internal investigations, published in July 2020, reiterates this intent: "[O]nce the preliminary investigation has concluded, whatever its outcome, the [Bishop] is obliged to send, without delay, an authentic copy of the relative acts to the CDF."¹⁰⁷ The acts are known as the records which reflect a diocese's investigation. Additionally, the records are subject to the retention requirements under canon law described in chapter I.A.

Despite the *Dallas Charter*, *Essential Norms*, and canon law requirements that the dioceses document these investigations, the records produced to the Attorney General's Office by the dioceses contained few, if any, canonical records, such as decrees opening or closing investigations, decrees appointing investigators, preliminary investigative reports, votums, or referrals to the CDF.

Moreover, the Worcester Diocese failed to reasonably document Diocesan Review Committee assessments into its review of clergy sexual abuse. Contrary to diocesan officials' claims that an investigator presents its findings in a written report to the Committee, we found many instances where these investigative records were not maintained. Although the Worcester Diocese maintains minutes of Committee meetings, senior diocese officials confirmed that these minutes are merely brief summaries of victim allegations and often lack any reference to the identity of the victim or the accused, or the Committee's vote as to the credibility of an allegation. Moreover, the diocese does not maintain records of Committee meetings in an accused priest's

¹⁰⁶ *Essential Norms*, Norm 2.

¹⁰⁷ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Vademecum On Certain Points of Procedure in Treating Cases of Sexual Abuse of Minors Committed By Clerics*, par. 69 (2020), https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20200716_vademecum-casi-abuso_en.html.

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

personnel files. According to these same officials, no other memorandum reflecting the basis of Committee deliberations or determinations of the credibility of allegations or recommendations made to the bishop is produced or prepared. The former Chancellor for the Worcester Diocese offered one reason for the failure to document Review Board conclusions or credibility determinations in a civil deposition: Committee members were worried they may be sued by victims. The failure to incorporate or document Review Board reports or conclusions regarding credibility determinations made it impossible to reconstruct the Committee's assessment of allegations against individual priests since the adoption of the *Dallas Charter* and prevented the Worcester Diocese from developing a full accounting of allegations against accused priests.

Our investigation in the Fall River Diocese, in particular, was hampered by the dearth of documentation related to Review Board meetings and of materials documenting the disposition of complaints which never reached the Review Board. One Fall River Review Board member we interviewed said it was rare that the board received written documents pertaining to the allegation or the subsequent investigation. Where they did receive such documents, they were collected and destroyed at the conclusion of the meeting, as were the members' handwritten notes on the matter. Within the Fall River Diocese, for the vast majority of determinations made prior to the 2020 reorganization into the Ministerial Review Board, precious little documentation has survived regarding either the deliberative process or the resulting recommendation made to the bishop.¹⁰⁸ The Fall River Diocese Policy for Protecting the Faithful indicates that the Victim Assistance Counselor will maintain records regarding outreach, assistance with therapy, and pastoral support and will not provide them for review to civil or canonical authorities. However, one diocesan employee with whom we spoke denied that any such records are kept and insisted that, though the office may have ongoing contact with victims that might span months or even years, no notes or records of these encounters are created or maintained. The Fall River Diocese has subsequently denied this statement is accurate.

¹⁰⁸ Since its 2020 reorganization, the Fall River Diocese has embraced a much more robust recordkeeping policy regarding allegations of child sexual abuse presented to its Ministerial Review Board, retaining both the documents presented to the board for its consideration, as well as detailed written findings that cite to the evidence supporting the Board's conclusion.

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

The Diocese of Worcester and, historically, the Fall River Diocese have failed to develop an effective case management system that allows them to efficiently, reliably, and thoroughly document and track allegations of sexual abuse, sexual misconduct, or inappropriate conduct with children. Without such a system, there is no way for the dioceses to monitor the steps taken to respond to child sexual abuse allegations over time. Ensuring that records are created and maintained is crucial to protecting children.

M. Failure to Protect and Encourage Whistleblowers

Whistleblowers can play a critical role in protecting children by identifying and preventing abuse. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends that youth-serving organizations create a climate that encourages people to question confusing or troubling behaviors and that requires employees and volunteers to report any behaviors and practices that may be harmful.¹⁰⁹ In Australia, which is widely recognized as having made effective progress in addressing institutional responses to child sexual abuse, the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse recommended that an institution's code of conduct should include a specific requirement to report any concerns, breaches, or suspected breaches of the code and should specifically outline "whistleblower" protections available to individuals who make complaints or reports in good faith to any institution engaging in child-related work.

Yet, the Fall River Diocese does not include in its codes of conduct whistleblower protection policies for diocesan staff or clergy who report code violations. The Fall River Diocese's current code of conduct requires clergy to "monitor their behavior and that of other Priests, staff, and volunteers, and a duty to report ethical or unprofessional misconduct and violations of this Code of Conduct." It warns that priests who fail to do so "will result in disciplinary action as the Priest failed morally to address sin and unsafe situations that could have prevented harm," but it does not offer any protection from retaliation for doing so. Although the Worcester Diocese's Code of Ministerial Conduct contains a whistleblower protection policy, the

¹⁰⁹ Marci A. Hamilton, Stephanie Dallam & Sabine Glocker, Child USA, *White Paper, Survey and Analysis of the Child Protection Policies of the 32 U.S. Roman Catholic Archdioceses*, 45 (2020), https://childusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Archdiocesan_Policies_WhitePaper_10-1-20s.pdf; James T. Keane, *If a Priest is 'Credibly Accused' of Sexual Abuse, What Does That Mean? Depends Whom You Ask*, America: The Jesuit Review (Dec. 20, 2018), <https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2018/12/20/if-priest-credibly-accused-sexual-abuse-what-does-mean-depends-whom-you-ask>.

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

policy appears to actively discourage whistleblowers. It warns potential whistleblowers that reports of concerns to anyone not involved in the investigation will be viewed as a serious disciplinary offense and may result in termination of that person's position within the diocese or a possible civil lawsuit. Negative consequences for reporting concerns can discourage others from coming forward—thus increasing the potential risk to children.¹¹⁰

Our investigation has produced examples of diocesan leadership personnel acting in ways that discourage, rather than encourage, whistleblowing. For example, in the Springfield Diocese, in the early 2000s, a parish employee had concerns about a seminarian and his interactions with the youth in the parish. She expressed her concerns about boundary violations and grooming-type behavior to her parish priest on multiple occasions, the vicar for clergy, and the director of vocations; but each time they were brushed aside. Ultimately, she was fired by the pastor and forced out of her parish, which she believes was a direct result of her persistence in reporting her concerns. The seminarian was ordained and, several years later, other allegations of abuse surfaced against him. He is now on the Springfield Diocese's Credibly Accused List. While the initial concerns brought by the whistleblower may not have constituted sexual abuse, her instincts were ultimately proven to be correct. Years later, the whistleblower came before the Review Board to discuss how the pastor and the diocese treated her for raising her concerns. She also requested to meet with then-Bishop Rozanski to express her concerns about the pastor who fired her and did not face any consequences for how he handled the now credibly accused priest. The meeting with the bishop took several months to schedule, and he came to the meeting unprepared and unbriefed. We spoke with another former diocese employee who reported that Bishop Rozanski asked her to cut ties with this whistleblower, who was assisting the diocese in another matter, out of fear that the witness would turn into "another [abuse survivor advocate]." Rather than supporting the whistleblower for doing the right thing, diocesan actors marginalized her, sending a strong message to the faith community about how whistleblowers will be treated.

¹¹⁰ Massachusetts Legislative Task Force on the Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse, Guidelines and Tools for the Development of Child Sexual Abuse Prevention and Intervention Plans by Youth-serving Organizations in Massachusetts, 53 (2017), <https://safekidsthive.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Child-Sexual-Abuse-Task-Force-Report-Updated-Links-2020-.pdf>.

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

Similarly, in the late 1980s, a Worcester priest reported allegations of child sexual abuse against a fellow priest to the Worcester Diocese. According to the whistleblower priest, the response from the Vicar General was, “I think I’ll take [the offending priest] on a fishing trip and have a good long talk with him.” After his initial report went unaddressed, the whistleblower priest disclosed his frustrations to a church psychologist. A few days later, he received a phone call from the bishop and the Vicar General, who reprimanded him for speaking with a mandated reporter about sexual abuse allegations, asking “Don’t you realize what you have done?” According to the whistleblower priest, no one from the church hierarchy ever sought to interview him about this allegation and it was never mentioned again. The accused priest was placed in therapy but was ultimately reassigned and allowed to continue in ministry for several years. The whistleblower priest struggled with the reaction he received from the bishop so much that he needed to seek out therapy in order to continue with his own ministry.

N. Annual Audits are Self-Policing

In conformity with Vatican and local directives, the USCCB created committees to assist and monitor diocesan efforts to comply with the *Dallas Charter*. The Secretariat of Child and Youth Protection was created to assist dioceses to develop child and youth protection programs and to provide an annual report on the progress of each diocese in implementing and complying with the mandates of the *Dallas Charter*. In addition, the National Review Board reviews the work of the Secretariat, makes recommendations for improvement, and alerts appropriate parties of actions that contradict the goals of the *Dallas Charter*. The USCCB also engages an independent audit firm to review compliance by each diocese in the country with the *Dallas Charter*. The results of these audits are compiled and reported annually by the National Review Board. The report includes the names of those dioceses that are not in compliance with the *Dallas Charter*.

The Dioceses of Worcester and Fall River have touted their compliance with these audits as evidence that they are adequately responding to clergy sexual abuse allegations. However, our investigation found that the annual audits are not a reliable means of discovering clergy sexual abuse or evaluating diocesan policies and procedures. The process is more akin to a survey, not an audit. The audits do not involve a detailed examination or qualitative evaluation

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

of the dioceses' investigations into allegations of sexual abuse, decisions based on those investigations, or their child protection systems. Moreover, though audits take place on-site every three years, for the other two years of the cycle, the information is entirely self-reported. The audits involve a questionnaire, which must be completed at the parish level, allowing parishes to self-report compliance with the *Charter* and *Norms*.

While we encourage institutional self-examination in the implementation and execution of policies to address the issue of clergy child sexual abuse, the self-audit process coordinated by the USCCB is not a substitute for a thorough evaluation of diocesan responses to abuse. First, the audits address only a select handful of criteria, all of which is, understandably, data that can be quantified. The questionnaires sent to dioceses request information on the number of allegations received and resolved during the prior audit year, as well as their disposition; the source of each allegation (i.e., victim, attorney, law enforcement, other diocese); the number and age range of victims; the date range when the abuse began; the relationship of the accused to the diocese and his present status; and the costs incurred for all child protection efforts.

The auditors' standards at times appear to be very low. For example, a Review Board which meets only annually is considered to meet "on a regular basis," and will be deemed in compliance. This can allow dioceses deemed out of compliance with the *Dallas Charter* to return to compliance with only the most minimal effort. For example, in the 2020 report published by the USCCB, a handful of dioceses were listed as non-compliant because their Review Boards had failed to meet at any point during the audit period; the report noted that each of these dioceses subsequently "convened a meeting of the Review Board which brings the Diocese into compliance with Article 2 of the *Charter*."¹¹¹

The data captured in the audit results, without more, can be deceptive. For example, we have observed periods of time in the Fall River Diocese when the Review Board did not appear to meet for an extended period or where no documentation exists to demonstrate the existence of such meetings. In Fall River, we observed that the break in regular meetings of the Review Board appears to have coincided with a practice by which the bishop, together with a handful of

¹¹¹ Secretariat of Child and Youth Protection, National Review Board & United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2020 Annual Report on the Implementation of the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People, 14 (Oct. 2021), <https://www.usccb.org/resources/CYP%20Annual%20Report%202020.pdf>.

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

close advisors, reached informal resolution of allegations of abuse. This practice, in turn, resulted in unequal treatment of clergy, with some being permitted to retire or resign in lieu of a more public disciplinary action. Thus, while a simple audit would capture whether a Review Board was meeting on a regular basis, to root out the underlying reason for a failure to convene, one must undertake a more in-depth examination and be willing to address the institutional issues that give rise to the symptom.

Finally, we have also noted that even when audits reveal key flaws, there is a failure to address the flaws. In audit reports, we have seen dioceses listed as “in compliance” while a variety of significant concerns raised by the auditors (such as, for example, inaccurate or misleading statistics provided) are listed as merely “issues” with corresponding “suggestions for [the bishop’s] consideration.” There is no apparent effort to require or even encourage the dioceses to report back on their efforts to implement any of these suggestions. One former Fall River Review Board member described the audits as “a joke” and stated that the diocese rarely implemented their recommendations.

X. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Attorney General’s Office recognizes that a bedrock principle of federal and state constitutional law is the protection of the free exercise of religion from government infringement. *See* U.S. Const. amend. 1; Mass. Const. Art. Amend. art. 46, § 1. While the dioceses may design and implement their own internal systems to address allegations of clergy sexual abuse within their ranks, the Attorney General’s Office has identified a set of best practices that can serve to remedy or address the shortcomings described in this report. These recommendations are based on our extensive study of the dioceses’ practices, and our own expertise in working with victims of crime and handling allegations of child sexual abuse. More critically, they may protect children, and support survivors.

A. Lists of Credibly Accused Priests

As of March 2024, over ninety percent of Catholic dioceses nationwide have published lists of credibly accused clergy. To date, the Worcester Diocese remains the only diocese in Massachusetts that has not done so. During this investigation, we asked each sexual abuse

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

survivor what changes they would like to see the dioceses implement in the future. All survivors from the Worcester Diocese named a Credibly Accused List as their number one request from the diocese.

We note that when the Fall River Diocese first published its Credibly Accused List in 2021, it emphasized in a related press release that more than seventy-five percent of the names on the list had been previously published by the diocese, in “media reports,” or on “lists published by other dioceses, religious orders, third-party advocates, or civil authorities.” But the remaining twenty-five percent of its accused clergy had not been publicly named at all. That is why we commend publicizing the list.

Over the course of our investigation, we noted that among those dioceses that have published lists of credibly accused clergy, there is not uniformity as to the criteria used to include a priest on the list. Nevertheless, even in the absence of a national, publicly available list of credibly accused priests with standardized inclusion criteria, individual diocesan lists of credibly accused clergy can serve to notify the public, validate survivors, and reduce the likelihood of credibly accused individuals being placed in future positions where they will have unfettered access to children.

B. Supervision of Credibly Accused Priests

The dioceses have failed to adequately supervise credibly accused priests suspended or removed from public ministry or otherwise placed on restricted ministry by the dioceses; these failures have allowed accused clergy to continue to move through parish communities as priests and to serve in roles such as schoolteachers, social workers, and scout leaders, that provide them with access to vulnerable populations. For these reasons, and to enhance the confidence and safety of survivors, parishioners, and the public at large, the Dioceses of Fall River, Springfield, and Worcester should significantly improve their processes to ensure compliance with the restrictions they impose. This starts with a monitoring program and comprehensive safety plan that delineates all restrictions placed on each credibly accused priest and ensures that the dioceses remain aware of each priest’s occupation, place of residence, and other circumstances that might bring them into contact with children, and that sets out clear repercussions if the

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

priest does not comply. In some dioceses outside of Massachusetts, credibly accused priests are placed in designated housing. This may make adequate supervision more feasible.¹¹² The protective value of these monitoring programs depends on active supervision of accused clergy and a rapid response to any violations of the restrictions imposed.

To prevent credibly accused clergy from obtaining access to children in paid or volunteer positions in parishes, the dioceses should maintain internal lists of all individuals on leave or subject to ministry restrictions that must be cross-checked before a person is accepted as an employee or volunteer. All individual parishes should have access to these lists. We also recommend that these records be shared with other dioceses and religious institutions. This, together with standardization and increased care in the use of letters of good standing, would ensure that priests subject to restrictions do not slip through the cracks and engage in any form of ministry or present as priests in good standing outside their home dioceses. Open internal dialogue is critical to ensuring that such communication lapses do not continue in the future.

C. Thorough and Timely Investigation of All Allegations with Documentation of the Process

It is of the utmost importance that every single allegation of child sexual abuse by church personnel be taken seriously, reported, and investigated fully and fairly. That is true whether the allegation is from the survivor or a third party, and whether or not the survivor chooses to provide their name or a written statement or participate in the Review Board process. The dioceses should not discount third-party or anonymous reports, fail to conduct full investigations, or wait lengthy periods of time to conduct investigations. Informal discussions or agreements cannot replace investigation and formal findings.

Further, the dioceses should commit to documenting thoroughly their handling of intakes and investigations. Every allegation should be documented. If it is not presented to the Review Board, that fact and the reason why should be documented. Review Board investigations and findings should also be documented. Since its reorganization in 2020, the Fall River Ministerial Review Board is a body with clearly stated rules and standards for proceedings, which produces a written summary of its findings for each allegation before it. Its written policy sets forth its

¹¹² Officials for the Worcester Diocese have informed the investigative team that they are aware of this option but are not using it for financial reasons.

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

review process, including the standard of proof applied. The promulgated standards for proceedings and written findings make clear the role and responsibilities of the body and provide a basis for its conclusions. This approach should be emulated by the other two dioceses. We note that the Diocese of Springfield has updated its Review Board bylaws and investigative procedures, and we encourage the Diocese of Worcester to do the same.

All documentation must also be stored appropriately. In each of the three dioceses, the state of the records we reviewed relating to some complaints and investigations, and whether or not they were referred to law enforcement, was inadequate. Investing in an electronic case management system that tracks intakes, investigations, their progress, and supporting documentation is critical. The system should track every allegation received by the dioceses—whether substantiated or not—so that the diocese can ensure their response in each case is thorough and complete.

Finally, we note that across all three dioceses, we observed years-long lags between complaint and conclusion. We recommend adoption of time standards for the adjudication of allegations of sexual abuse against individual priests. These standards should balance the need for a full and fair investigation with the goal of reaching a timely conclusion. The time standards should also include goals for a diocesan response or outreach to victims after the initial complaint, referral to civil law enforcement, internal investigation, referral to the Review Board, and adjudication.

As soon as a Review Board deems an allegation credible, that decision and the decision of the diocese to seek laicization or other penalties should be publicly disclosed without delay. Any referrals to the Vatican should be made in a timely fashion. If certain classes of priests (such as the elderly, or those in poor health) are typically exempt from diocesan policies, this should be transparent to parishioners. The dioceses should also publicly disclose where any other special exemptions from their policies and procedures are made, and why.

D. Ensuring Professionalism of Investigative and Adjudicatory Processes

The hallmarks of a fair investigation are its independence and the absence of any conflicts. We are encouraged by the steps taken by the Dioceses of Fall River and Springfield to increase

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

the professionalism of their investigators. All investigations should be conducted by contracted, independent, third-party investigators who are appropriately trained and experienced in sexual abuse investigations. These investigators should be supported by a process that includes written guidelines and procedures for conducting investigations, maintaining and preserving electronic records of those investigations, and communicating written reports and findings directly to the Review Board. To avoid conflicts and potential prejudice, bishops and senior diocesan officials should not be involved in investigations. We commend the Fall River Diocese's 2020 revision to its written policy, which adopts and incorporates these procedures.

While we are encouraged by the efforts all three dioceses have made to include expert representation on Review Boards, the boards' ability to independently and objectively assess sexual abuse complaints is critical, and we urge the dioceses to use a transparent, standardized, and fair process to fill openings on the board.

Review Board decisions, and their work in general, should be recorded in minutes that clearly reflect the identity of the accused priest, survivor, and the board's credibility vote, along with any recommendations made by the board regarding the priests' suitability for ministry. We note that the written decisions of the Fall River Diocese's Ministerial Review Board do precisely this and applaud the recent changes that led to this policy. We encourage all dioceses to maintain these records electronically, with copies placed in accused priests' personnel files.

Review Boards in all three dioceses should also promulgate specific policies for recusal of members based on conflicts of interest. These policies should not only prohibit actual conflicts, but also seek to avoid the appearance of conflict.

To address the historic failures of some dioceses to provide their Review Boards with unfettered access to all prior allegations and all investigative materials for each allegation, the dioceses should publicly commit to submitting all allegations to their Review Boards, even those allegations—such as those against deceased priests—that do not require adjudication of a priest's ongoing fitness for public ministry. Such allegations can be reflected on dioceses' lists of credibly accused clergy, where appropriate, and can provide Review Boards important information about institutional or structural issues that inform their policy recommendations.

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

Submitting all allegations to Review Boards also provides survivors an important opportunity to be heard and to fully access services available through the dioceses.

To fully evaluate a claim, the Review Boards must have access to the complete personnel files of accused priests, including the “secret archive” files, and not merely assignment lists. We are encouraged by the inclusion of this specific power to access all applicable records within the Springfield Review Board’s bylaws. All Review Boards should have and exercise that power.

E. Transparency and Oversight Regarding Religious Order Priests

The bishops retain the ultimate authority regarding which priests can minister within their dioceses. The dioceses should, accordingly, take greater care in the use of religious order priests within their parishes. Parishioners deserve to know that any priest ministering within the diocese has been vetted and has been found to be suitable for ministry, and that any allegations of abuse will be appropriately addressed.

Both the diocese and, if applicable, the pertinent religious order should have a clear and transparent understanding of how sexual abuse allegations will be handled, and this process should be communicated to any individual making an allegation against an order priest. Where a diocese does not have evidence or assurances that a particular order has the procedures and resources to adequately handle sexual misconduct claims and support victims, there is too great a risk that sexual misconduct and abuse will go unaddressed unless the diocese is willing to use its own resources and Review Board to evaluate the allegations made against a religious order priest operating within the diocese. The dioceses must further keep closely apprised of each complaint and take responsibility to ensure that each and every allegation of abuse against a religious order priest receives a full investigation and appropriate adjudication. The dioceses should also be responsible for ensuring that accused order priests are subject to the same adequate supervision we recommended above for diocesan priests, including a comprehensive monitoring program and safety plan, whether implemented by the diocese or by the individual order.

Finally, the dioceses must maintain accurate and complete records on all religious order priests ministering within their jurisdiction.

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

F. Memoranda of Understanding with Law Enforcement

The evaluation of whether an allegation of sexual abuse may result in a prosecutable offense should be left to law enforcement, and therefore, comprehensive reporting is critical. Clergy members and other enumerated church leaders have a legal obligation to make a report to DCF whenever they have “reasonable cause to believe that a child under the age of eighteen years is suffering physical or emotional injury resulting from abuse inflicted upon him which causes harm or substantial risk of harm to the child’s health or welfare, including sexual abuse.”¹¹³ However, each diocese should have an operable memorandum of understanding with each local district attorney’s office with jurisdiction over the diocese that requires the prompt reporting of all allegations of sexual abuse, and not merely those involving children. The reporting obligation should extend to all allegations of abuse, regardless of when they occurred, include a requirement of the production of all documents relevant to the allegation and to the alleged perpetrator, and should permit the district attorney’s office sufficient time to evaluate the allegation and decide whether further criminal investigation is merited before the diocese conducts its own investigation. The memorandum of understanding should also require disclosure to the Attorney General’s Office. While the Attorney General’s Office does not typically prosecute individual cases of sexual abuse, such disclosure would ensure that a single prosecution agency has a full picture of all allegations of sexual abuse received within a diocese and that the information is not segregated between district attorney’s offices. This is particularly important for dioceses like Fall River and Springfield, each of which is subject to the jurisdiction of three different district attorney’s offices. Beyond a written agreement, the dioceses should foster a spirit of cooperation and collaboration with law enforcement. Law enforcement organizations and the dioceses should be allies in advocating for the survivors of sexual abuse and protecting children.

G. Stronger Whistleblower Protections for Reporters of Sexual Abuse

The Massachusetts Legislative Task Force on the Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse has noted that, to effectively deter and prevent child abuse, codes of conduct should include clear

¹¹³ G.L. c. 119, § 51A(a).

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

descriptions of the lines of communication and the process and timeline for reporting concerns, suspicions, or allegations about behaviors contrary to the Code—and what will follow—and should outline penalties for failing to report.¹¹⁴ The dioceses should make clear that reporting child sexual abuse or sexual misconduct to law enforcement and the Safe Environment Office is welcomed and will not be punished. To create a culture that encourages reporting of abuse or misconduct, the dioceses should ensure they have adequate written whistleblower protection policies which clearly state that personnel will not be retaliated against for reporting abuse or inappropriate behavior.

In 2025, the Springfield Diocese strengthened its protections for individuals who report misconduct by expressly prohibiting retaliation or discrimination against individuals who make a complaint, report sexual abuse, or report violations of the Code of Conduct. The Diocese's current policies also clarify reporting obligations and identify channels for reporting concerns, including to civil authorities and designated diocesan personnel. The policies could be further strengthened by providing more specific timelines and procedures for reporting concerns and clearly identifying the consequences for failing to report.

The Worcester Diocese should revise its whistleblower policy to encourage whistleblowers to come forward without having to fear litigation.

H. Victim Support

Over the past twenty years, the Dioceses of Fall River, Springfield, and Worcester have taken significant steps in meeting the needs of victims of clergy child sexual abuse. Nonetheless, given the grave and long-lasting impact that victims have suffered and will continue to suffer throughout their lives, work remains to be done.

All dioceses should have a Victim Assistance Coordinator (VAC) who functions independently from the diocesan hierarchy. The VAC should be solely focused on providing information, care, and support to victims. The VACs should not have any involvement in the investigation of allegations, other than to keep the victim apprised of the process and coordinate contact between the victim and the diocese. From the outset of the investigation, the VAC should

¹¹⁴ See Massachusetts Legislative Task Force on the Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse, *supra* note 111, at 53-69.

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

clearly explain the Review Board process to victims and outline the anticipated timeline. As the process is ongoing, the VAC should provide timely and regular updates. Victims should be notified of the outcome before the dioceses make any public statements about the case.

We also recommend that, in general, the Review Board processes used by the dioceses be considerate of survivors and the difficulties they face. For survivors of trauma, and particularly childhood sexual assault, speaking out about their abuse can be profoundly difficult. The Review Board process must be designed to support survivors and encourage disclosures. To that end, the Review Board members should receive trauma training. We understand that, after investigators raised the issue, the Fall River Diocese made this commitment. We strongly recommend that the dioceses require ongoing and comprehensive training for VACs, investigators, and Review Board members on abuse dynamics, delayed disclosure, and credibility assessment in child abuse cases.

The dioceses should offer complainants every opportunity to be heard. In Worcester, victims are never invited to appear before the Review Committee, even though some have expressed the desire to do so. Several Review Board members in Springfield and Fall River have reported to us that hearing directly from survivors has left a powerful impression on them. All complainants should be offered the opportunity to appear before the Review Board and make a statement directly to them, if they so choose. If a complainant elects to appear directly before the Review Board, he or she should have the right to bring counsel or any other support person with them. Complainants should also have the opportunity to submit any documents or written witness statements that they wish to for the Review Board's consideration.

We also have heard from survivors that the dioceses should improve how they handle requests for therapy and other support. All dioceses must be sure that their victim-assistance programs are supportive, trauma-informed, and helpful to survivors.¹¹⁵ We recommend that the dioceses retain a third-party administrator for referrals and reimbursements, which would allow victims to feel more comfortable that their treatment is separated from the Church. We also urge the dioceses to support victims of clergy sexual abuse by offering financial support for social

¹¹⁵ To this end, the Worcester Diocese should promptly discontinue the practice of paying for treatment for survivors with checks from the House of Affirmation, a notorious "treatment" center for predator priests.

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

services commonly needed as a result of such abuse. Most notably, this should include support for alcohol and substance use treatment.

I. Community Education and Transparency

Many of the victims, experts, and advocacy groups who spoke with us emphasized the importance of safety education, especially for children, and community education about how to report abuse. We are heartened to see that each of the dioceses has implemented some educational programming for staff and parishioners, and particularly for children. Those programs should be continued and consistently updated over time as best practices in safety education evolve. We also believe more can and should be done to promote awareness and prevention of abuse in parish communities.

Public announcements regarding the diocesan policies for addressing sexual abuse and complaint procedures, as mandated by the *Dallas Charter*, serve an important role in protecting public safety. We hope the dioceses will continue these periodic announcements. We urge the dioceses to make every effort to ensure parishioners are notified of the dioceses' zero-tolerance policy regarding sexual abuse as well as where and how abuse can be reported in each diocese. Such efforts will be most effective and beneficial when parishioners encounter them repeatedly, and both orally and in writing.

The dioceses should also periodically notify parishioners of the contents of the clergy code of conduct and should make the document easily accessible on diocese websites. Such a step is essential in promoting a culture where the community can feel confident in what behaviors are inappropriate from priests, and grooming behavior can be clearly identified in the early stages.

J. Update and Follow Policies

Over the past several years, the dioceses have taken significant steps to improve their processes. We encourage them to continually improve their policies and procedures to reflect best practices. The Springfield Diocese has taken several concrete steps to strengthen its child-protection policies and practices by updating both its Code of Conduct and its Policy for the Protection of Children and Youth in July 2025. The July 2025 revision of its Code of Conduct is a meaningful improvement over the prior three-page policy, but it does not fully address the

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

deficiencies identified during this investigation. The revised Code continues to rely on discretionary language in areas where clear, mandatory safeguards are warranted, and it does not provide an adequate alternative reporting mechanism when a supervisor is suspected of misconduct. These shortcomings leave important protections dependent on individual interpretation and discretion and leave room for failure in its reporting structure. The Diocese should strengthen the Code by converting critical child-safety protections into unequivocal requirements and establishing independent reporting pathways that prioritize the safety of children and the prompt reporting of concerns over institutional or supervisory interests.

The Worcester Diocese's Policies and Procedures for the Protection of Minors were last updated in 2016, and its Code of Ministerial Conduct dates from 2021. Notably, however, the Worcester Diocese's policy for social media use in parish programs has not been updated since 2011. In 2020, the Fall River Dioceses updated its policies regarding handling child sexual abuse allegations and has published new written guidelines for the Ministerial Review Board, which it updated again in 2023 and 2025. The dioceses should ensure that their policies are updated regularly to reflect current guidance and best practices.

Over the seven decades of records we reviewed, we have seen in the Springfield and Fall River Dioceses a cycle of creating policies to address child sexual abuse but failing to consistently act in accordance with or adequately implement and enforce those policies.¹¹⁶ The Fall River Diocese undertook major reforms to its handling of abuse allegations in 1992, 2002, and 2020. However, our review of the diocese's compliance with its own internal 1992 and 2002 policies revealed a significant gap between written policy and actual practice.¹¹⁷ While we are encouraged by the dioceses' recent reforms, we recognize that a policy is only as effective as its implementation and encourage the dioceses to commit to fully executing and enforcing the zero-tolerance policies they put in place to protect children.

¹¹⁶ See Section IX(D).

¹¹⁷ See Sections IX(A), (B), (E), (F), and (M).

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

K. Affirmative Release from Confidentiality Provisions

The *Essential Norms* prohibit dioceses from entering settlements that contain confidentiality provisions unless the survivor specifically requests them.¹¹⁸ While the investigation indicated the dioceses have followed this requirement since 2002 (when the *Essential Norms* were adopted), there is confusion amongst survivors who entered into settlements before 2002. Rather than placing the burden on the individual survivor to request a release from these provisions, the dioceses should affirmatively release all survivors from any confidentiality provisions in settlement agreements related to child sexual abuse that predate 2002. The Springfield Diocese already has taken this step, and Worcester and Fall River should follow. In addition, the dioceses should publicly state that the identities of priests or lay persons named in settlement agreements formerly covered by confidentiality provisions may be made public, but that no victim's identity will be released or revealed without their permission.

¹¹⁸ The Springfield Diocese has specifically agreed not to impose these provisions as part of its MOU with the local district attorneys.

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

XI. APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Statements from Survivors

Appendix 2: Resource Organizations

Appendix 3: The House of Affirmation in the Worcester Diocese

Appendix 4: Glossary of Terms

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

Appendix 1: Statements from Survivors

This appendix contains statements from some of the survivors of clergy child sexual abuse whom the Attorney General's Office interviewed during the course of this investigation.¹¹⁹ We are deeply grateful to them, and to all survivors who spoke with us, for their willingness to come forward and share their stories.

¹¹⁹ Minor edits have been made to some statements for clarity.

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

Phil's Legacy

In the early 1960's, my brother, Phil Saviano, was repeatedly abused by our local parish priest in the small town of Douglas, Massachusetts, in the Worcester Diocese. For thirty years he was silent, however in 1992 he by chance saw a newspaper article and learned that his abuser had just been convicted of abuse in New Mexico and sentenced to 275 years prison. He learned that for the past thirty years his abuser was allowed to continue his abuse in many other church parishes. As a result of that revelation and realizing that he had to do something to protect innocent children and also to have the church held accountable for its crimes, he went public with his story and began his pursuit of justice. He suspected that abuse within the church was widespread, and that bishops and others were engaged in a massive cover-up and that they facilitated continued abuse by moving priests from parish to parish and hiding the truth. And Phil set out to validate, document and tell the truth.

Our family was a devout Catholic family of pious worshipers, altar boys and active church members. That made it all the more difficult for Phil to reveal his abuse. However, in 1993 he told our father and family about his abuse and that he was intent on holding the church accountable. Unfortunately, our father had an angry reaction, expressing concern about the family reputation and adverse impact on relationships with friends. As Phil reached out to others who had been abused by the priest in Douglas, our father also began to receive calls from other parents, and this resulted in years of estrangement between him and Phil. Phil also received the same estrangement from some relatives. Fortunately, other than his father, his immediate family members were strongly supportive of his efforts. Years later, as it became clear to the world that Phil was right, our father apologized to him and strongly supported him from that point on.

Phil understood that the crimes of the church had two significant impacts. First and most important it destroyed the childhood of the victims and in most cases severely impacted their adult lives as well. And second, it was destroying the sanctity of the Catholic church from within. And he became determined to address both. He was compelled to save children from the horrors he had experienced and to bring support to others who had been abused. He also wanted to bring justice to the criminals within the church, and by doing so bring renewal and healing to the church he had once loved.

In 1997, Phil formalized his outreach to other victims by starting the New England chapter of SNAP, Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests. He took responsibility for SNAP's web site, recreating it as an educational site for reporters and the public and reorienting its focus to become a critical lifeline, connecting and mobilizing clergy abuse survivors across the United States. He also served two terms as a director of SNAP and took allegations that Vatican officials were committing crimes against humanity to the International Criminal Court in The Hague. In these roles and for many years thereafter Phil counseled many abuse victims, supporting them in seeking and achieving a happier, more productive life.

--Continued on next page

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

Continued from previous page--

In 2001, Phil brought the files of his research to a meeting with the Boston Globe Spotlight investigative team. Phil convinced them that the abuse was prevalent throughout American Catholic dioceses, was being covered up by senior church officials and abusive priests were being shuttled from parish to parish. The results of that meeting were the series of articles by the Globe exposing the crimes of the church and leading to global outrage and exposure of the extent of these crimes. It also led to a Pulitzer Prize for the Boston Globe and the Academy Award best film Spotlight within which Phil was a featured character.

Phil was known by his friends as a wonderful human being characterized by deep reflective thinking, courage, compassion and commitment to truth and justice. And beneath it all was a spine of steel. Phil used all of these characteristics to become an early, effective leader in the fight against priest sexual abuse. Much of what has been written about his work has been as it relates to uncovering abuse within the church, shedding light on the culture of silence and protection and in influencing change. And that is an important aspect of his legacy. An equally important part of his legacy is the work he has done in bringing hope, dignity, strength and rebirth to many of those who have been abused. During the last few months of his life, there was an outpouring of hundreds of emails from around the globe from those who were abused thanking him for giving them the guidance and courage to move past those experiences to a more joyful and productive life. More than a few of those emails, and the comments to me by several survivors in the wake receiving lines, contain the sentiment, "If not for you, I would not be alive today." It is impossible to over emphasize how important a legacy that is.

My brother Phil was a wonderful man. Every day since his death, I think of him and his impact. I thank him for overcoming the difficult obstacles and doing the hard work resulting in his many achievements. I thank him for his relentless search for truth and justice and exposing the criminal behavior within the church. For his influence in changing the behavior of the church and to hold abusers and their protectors accountable. For bringing dignity, rebirth, happiness, and love to many of the abused. And finally, for protecting thousands and thousands of future generations of young children across the world from ever having to experience what he went through.

Jim Saviano

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

Deliver Us from Evil

Jane Martin

June 21, 2022

This is extremely difficult to write down on paper. So please be understanding, I'm not an author.

As a kid I really had everything. A beautiful start and upbringing. My parents, Richard and Pauline Martin from Sturbridge, and my brother, Neil, and I made all our Catholic sacraments and attended Notre Dame church in Southbridge, MA every Sunday. We also attended Catholic school at Notre Dame grades 1-4 on Pine Street in Southbridge. Many of our teachers, especially for French, religion, and music were nuns from Notre Dame. We drove from Sturbridge to attend these important things in our life that we did at Notre Dame.

I remember when Father Kelley, at that time Deacon Kelley, joined Notre Dame. It was right after meeting him, that everyone seemed to love Deacon Kelley. He was "childlike" with all the children at Notre Dame Church! We would attend Mass on Sunday morning and after the service many families started gathering around him outside on the sidewalk.

Kelley, after a short time, had gained the trust of my parents and began taking my brother and I to places like the Quabbin Reservoir and the Sturbridge Motor Lodge, where they had an indoor pool.

I recall Kelley picking us up in a green car that the parish of Notre Dame subsidized. Then it all began:

At the American Motor Lodge Pool is the first occasion that I remember. He picked us up. Only being 7, I had to change into my bathing suit alone in the women's changing room. That was scary enough! He held me close and made me sit on his lap in the pool. He grabbed my "bum" and told me he "loved my bum." It was then, with his tongue and breath on my neck, he was slowly slipping his hand under my bathing suit and gently touch the entrance of my vagina. His fingers continuously over and over my vagina entrance, as well as my anal entrance.

-taking break-

After going to the American Motor Lodge pool, my dad opened our new inground pool that Kelley had an open invitation to. He would call and say he would love to come over and take a swim. I recall the feeling of anxiety. The sexual abuse continued in my parents' pool at that time. The exact same pattern of hugging and kissing my neck, and then groping my body.

-groping search: to touch or fondle someone for sexual pleasure without consent-

Now, this man, Robert E. Kelley, was giving me fancy cards and jewelry. A silver set jade green stone in a ring. Can you imagine, what in God's name was he doing giving me a ring?

--Continued on next page

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

Continued from previous page—

He told me many times that he “loved me,” and he was fondling me, and I'm eight years old!!

The sexual and mental abuse continued to the Rectory of Notre Dame. My brother and I were invited to the Rectory at Notre Dame.

This is where the priests live. He would even pick us up in Sturbridge and bring us home by 9:00 pm. We would go into his room, and he would play songs. One in particular for me: “Harmony” by Elton John, “over and over” he was becoming obsessed, and it was frightening for me as a child.

Pastor Page lived across the hall from Kelley (his room was right at the top of the stairs). He had to have known that something not ethical was going on with his new young priest, Kelley.

Conclusion:

I had been sexually abused as a child, my trust in people was unsteady, I was horrified. I suffered anxiety as a child, and I still suffer from it now. I was misguided as a child, and it affected me permanently; my choices in relationships have been shaky to say the least. However, I don't blame my parents for anything. They did not know.

I have suffered from depression since I was young. There was always something different about me. I was sad. I'm still sad. I've been married five times, I had two children, with my second and third husbands. My firstborn, my son, committed suicide after suffering from mental illness. The news from the clergy abuse cases was devastating for him. As a young adult, I suffered with substance and alcohol abuse.

The impact of this sexual/ mental abuse has and continues to be devastating. I continue to struggle with bad dreams and nightmares, I have made poor choices, and I feel as though I have kept a lot inside for years.

I hope and pray to Jehovah that this will somehow be resolved.

* * *

I want to thank you for all the help you have given me. And I will continue to try and help in any way I can.

With love,
Jane Martin

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

Statement

I am writing this Victim Impact Statement some 50 years after I was first sexually assaulted by priest R., then Headmaster of Holy Name High School (Worcester, MA) and Chaplain of the Massachusetts State Police. I had just turned 16. I was a naïve, young adolescent girl with a deep sense of spirituality and questions about entering religious life. The assaults continued – in his apartment and car – for two years, on 200 some odd occasions. As I struggle to articulate the impact of the sexual abuse inflicted on me by priest R., I recognize the layer upon layer of trauma. And one word best characterizes the impact: loss.

The immediate impact was profound and is still a haunting memory. On that fateful afternoon of the first assault, I was forcefully and brutally robbed of a mutually consensual, appropriate, healthy, first sexual experience. I suffered pain and physical loss of control over my own body. I lost my sense of self, safety, goodness, trust, and innocence. Priest R. destroyed my understanding of and trust in a God who loved and protected me. I was plunged into a darkness I could never have imagined.

Priest R.'s insistence that I submit to his demands on my time and my body caused me to sever meaningful relationships. Consequently, I had no close friends in high school following the start of the abuse. I experienced a sense of isolation from "everyone" including myself – which to some degree, persists today. I became estranged from family as I tried to hide the physical signs of abuse. I felt afraid in the halls and on the grounds of the school because I didn't know when priest R. would "show up" – to either "observe" me or escort me to his apartment on the first floor of the school where he would sexually abuse me for several hours. On more than a few occasions, I laid in the snow at a local cemetery praying for the relief of death.

High school graduation brought an end to the sexual assaults but the recurring nightmares and feelings of shame and humiliation – of being "damaged goods" – are the persistent demons I continue to fight. I buried my emotional and psychic pain, determined to "be normal", and to forge a successful career far from the scene of the crime and surrounded by "new friends." Before too long though, I realized that the psychic energy to keep trauma and loss buried is utterly overwhelming. The physical manifestations of "flight or fight" – hypervigilance, tense muscles, difficulty breathing deeply and "normally" – still constantly plague me. I have periods of deep and lingering depression which continue to require long-term counseling and medication.

I am not alone in acknowledging my losses. My immediate family – including my parents, siblings, nieces and nephews – has also suffered a substantial and prolonged loss of faith in God and their church following my disclosure to them in 1998 of the sexual abuse by this priest whom they had trusted. They all remain estranged from the Catholic Church.

The losses I can articulate are significant. But perhaps more haunting to me is what I can't name.

--Continued on next page

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

Continued from previous page --

When priest R. raped me the first time – he forever changed the course of my life. Who might I have been? What might I have accomplished had I chosen a different path in life? How might I have served the people of God? And so, I also grieve for what might have been – just as a mother grieves the loss of her miscarried child – weeping and wailing without knowing if she lost a daughter or a son.

For 30 years or so, I was able to stay relatively focused on career, family, and friends. That abruptly changed when the January 6, 2002, *Boston Sunday Globe* describing the extent of horrific clergy abuse and the attendant cover-ups was published.

The ensuing days and months plunged me into a paralyzing depression previously unknown to me. I struggled enormously with more terrifying nightmares, nausea, inability to focus at work, neglect of family and friends – and on several occasions I felt that survival no longer seemed desirable - occasions which themselves were terrifying in their intensity and unexpectedness.

It was clear that litigation was an option for redress, but I rejected the litigation process because it was adversarial by nature; it did not address the pastoral needs of the litigant; it was painfully prolonged; and it brought forth legal maneuverings and behavior on the part of Church lawyers that was abhorrent to me. I desperately wanted “restorative justice.”

The Worcester Diocese published “Policy on the Sexual Abuse of Minors” (May 30, 2002) and in this document I found what I believed would be the path towards reconciliation and healing for which I yearned. I prepared my statement and request for pastoral justice; and in a face-to-face meeting with two members of the Committee, I read my statement in the presence of my Advocate and my therapist. The process was cathartic, and I experienced the members as empathic.

My hopes for true pastoral justice, however, were soon dashed. It took 82 days for the full Diocesan Review Board to complete the review of my case and an additional 13 days to finally receive a letter stating that the Committee found my allegations “credible.” They agreed to pay counseling costs going forward (I asked for retroactive payment) but did not agree to any other requests, including a request to send a letter of acknowledgement and apology to my parents; for the Diocese to direct Holy Name HS to remove priest R.’s picture from the school and dissolve the scholarships in his name; or a request for the Diocese to contact the Massachusetts State Police to dissolve the Peace Officer’s Award in priest R.’s name. A face-to-face meeting with Bishop Reilly a month later brought a verbal apology, agreement to pay past counseling costs, and a promise to consider my requests for just restitution. My two advocates followed up with many phone calls, and sent emails and written letters, to no avail.

My advocates resigned 367 days after my first meeting with the Committee members, writing in part in their letter of termination to me:

--Continued on next page

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

--Continued from previous page

“The past eighteen months have proven correct our initial estimation that the new policies and procedures of the Worcester Diocese fall short of providing fair process or restorative results. Victim’s Advocate, Frances Nugent, herself has demonstrated commitment to redressing the wrongs perpetrated on you by a now deceased employee of the diocese. But her good faith efforts have not altered the refusal of Diocesan leadership to embody through action the words they write and preach.”

Finally, 1 year, 3 months and 7 days after delivering my written and oral statement to the two Diocesan Review Committee members, I received a commitment that the Diocese would fund half of my tuition to obtain a Master’s degree in Pastoral Ministry as part of my request for restorative justice. The entire process, however, was needlessly protracted, at times adversarial, and ultimately traumatizing and re-victimizing. It was about anything but “restoring right relationships.” I consider this a failure of the Worcester Diocese to uphold the intent of the Diocesan Policy to “be responsive to the needs of the victims” as a “way of assuring (the victim) that they have been heard in their suffering and that they will be assisted in their journey toward healing.” As such, this missed opportunity by the Diocese of Worcester is perhaps one of the bitterest losses that I have suffered due to the sexual abuse and exploitation by priest R.

-Anonymous Female

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

The impact of the abuse filled many years of my life with drug, alcohol abuse and suicidal ideation. I finally got sober in 1998 and 13 months later one of my twin daughters, Shawna, was killed in a car accident at the age of 16. She only had a sober father for a year. I feel our chance at any sort of normal father/daughter relationship was robbed because of all of the struggles I had trying to cope with the abuse.

-Skip Shea

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

6/14/2022

To whom this may concern,

I am writing this impact statement because I am a victim of sexual abuse crimes by priest B. I want to inform the authorities, the Catholic church, and the public of these crimes. It has been difficult for me to write this impact statement as the long-term effect of the abuse has permeated my life in every way and level.

My family was a pretty typical large Irish catholic family with 9 children in which the central core of the family was our Catholic faith. When I was young, I would attend Mass regularly with my family but that all changed when I no longer felt safe around priest B. I knew at a young age that this place of refuge for so many had become a place of fear for me.

The abuse by priest B. has changed the trajectory of my life in so many ways, changing my relationships with those I love, and is currently straining my relationship with my husband. My ability to relate to others has been altered forever. I have difficulty sharing what I have been going through, especially now, leaving me feeling isolated. My ability to relate to my mother, especially, was forever changed. It pains me to tears to now understand how the abuse affected our relationship, God rest her soul.

I have had a longing for community involvement and at times I have needed guidance from someone of Faith, but I never felt safe with any priest since, throughout my life. Whenever I attend a Catholic wedding, christening, or funeral, I would often be torn about attending; however, choosing not to attend would bring feelings of shame and selfishness, because not attending would bring pain to others, especially my mother. When I did attend with my mother, she would be disgusted and disappointed in me for refusing to accept Communion. There were times that I would sometimes succumb to my mother's pressure, leaving me distraught with feelings of shame and self-loathing. I get a sick, sinking feeling with every church service and Mass that I attend.

He stole my faith, my sense of church community, and my relationship with my mother. I have always longed for a community connection similar to my small-town upbringing, a sense of belonging. Our Catholic church should have been a safe place for me or anyone, but it wasn't.

It is beyond frustrating to have learned that incidents were reported "decades ago" to the Church authorities and nothing was done! I ask of you, could my years of pain and suffering have been avoided? Could I have had a loving, caring relationship with my mother?

I feel sad and angry and honestly, I don't feel that my impact statement will have any impact on the church. Maybe I could have addressed my issues earlier if we had known of his previous abuse. I am now left with unwanted, traumatic images occurring during my sleepless nights.

Thank you,
Anonymous Female

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

Statement from Frank Fitzpatrick

Father James R. Porter raped me in the early 1960s when I was a preteen altar boy. He was able to get to me because he was my local priest, revered by parishioners, in charge of the altar boys, and loved by me and all the other school children at St. Mary School in North Attleboro. Then the Catholic Church raped me by protecting him every time his evil was reported to them, transferring him from parish to parish, even state to state, leaving me and literally hundreds of others in pain for the next 30 years, until finally we, the survivors, dragged the sickening story into the light. It wasn't the Church, the self-proclaimed arbiters of goodness, who did the good deed. It was us. (The Diocese of Fall River can find all the details of their coverups in their Secret Archives, if they haven't belatedly incinerated them by now – or search newspaper articles). For decades, I had traumatic amnesia of what Father Porter did to me, but that did not relieve the emotional torture that he created by his betrayal of my trust. I was always sad and full of self-disgust. My older son once said to me that he had never seen me "really laugh." I felt uncomfortable, anxious, distrustful, that something was wrong with me. Driving home from work, if it was after dark, I would sometimes let out screams to ease the emotional pain I was feeling. I knew something was very wrong, but not who and what it came from. I couldn't tell myself; I had traumatic amnesia for 27 years, and so I couldn't tell anyone else.

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

I was an altar boy.

Picture a nine-year-old, a fourth grader, smiling and walking to school. Not a care in mind, thinking of nothing but playing with his friends in a world that was safe and trusting. Now think of that nine-year-old, face down in a mattress, being repeatedly raped by priests. Imagine that boy having his bones broken, sodomized, raped, punched, bit, tortured, brutalized, threatened. Imagine that boy having his soul ripped to pieces by monsters hiding under the cloak of their so-called god. For almost 3 years.

I was NINE! A small, innocent, terrified fourth grade child.

What do you think the world looks like to a boy who had to go clean his underpants out every time he was raped, hiding in the woods, afraid to go home? Trying to be invisible behind trees because he knows there is no safe place for him and he'll get in trouble? A scared boy, who was supposed to be loved and nurtured - who DESERVED to be loved and nurtured? A scared boy, alone with no guidance, no one to help. Forced to deal with adult themes he couldn't yet understand all by himself.

That little boy protected the man that I am today by burying what was done to him for 50+ years. That brave little warrior guarded my heart and soul until he knew I was ready to bare his agony; his trauma; his tears; his unflinchingly dangerous and scary universe.

Time stopped when I was sexually abused. And it didn't start again until I entered therapy. When my memories came out, I felt naked, alone, beaten, raped and afraid again. I didn't understand what was happening. I felt hollow and terribly pained after the first incident when I was in the woods hiding. I was scared and alone. I hid from everything when I was a child and hid again when the memories came back.

I lived with blinders on my whole life.

I repressed bad memories because I was not able to talk about it to anyone. The impact effects of the abuse were fully activated within me ever since the abuse started. I was always afraid of those people that should have cared the most for me. I was afraid of authority figures, which included all adults.

I didn't grow up in a healthy environment. When I was sexually abused, I was kicked out of normal developmental tracks. Healthy developmental trial and error steps were not available. I never learned to fit in and, as a result, I never felt connected. I never knew my worth. I had to learn everything on my own, smothered in guilt and shame. My entire childhood was taken away from me.

I felt, as a child, I was a bad person because that's why they hurt me so much. I grew up feeling unlovable, unloved, unwanted, and unliked.

--Continued on next page

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

Continued from previous page--

I couldn't think otherwise because I was too young to know what happened was wrong. I thought if this is how I am treated by the priests then I must be a bad person. And everything that happened was my fault.

I am afraid to go out of my comfort zone. The adult in me knows I can't be hurt again but the child emotions inside of me feel like it's going to happen again every day. I have lost my touch and sense of power over my life. I've been in individual therapy since 6/2/14. This has been a lifesaver through this misery. I have also been in group therapy since 9/27/16.

Growing up, I felt ignored and oftentimes invisible. I learned that to be safe I needed to be quiet and not express myself. I thought I was not worthy of being loved because I was bad. I avoided standing out because that would make me a target. These same fears continue today.

I never felt connected within my family and needed to grow up alone in a 6-member household. I needed speech therapy at 9 or 10 years old because I could not speak up. And reading help that lasted into high school.

I also started smoking during the abuse period. I woke up crying to myself a lot as a kid and also after the memories came back. And still do at times. I wet the bed as a kid. And had a reoccurring abuse related nightmare. I had friends as a child, but the total number lowered at the abuse time.

I have trust issues. All relationships and a marriage failed. Relationships become threatening to me. I isolate in them and from myself. I don't trust that I am lovable, wanted, or worthy. The role in my family was the funny guy. I relied on humor to pretend everything was alright with me. And that continued throughout school and my adult life. I felt if people liked me, they wouldn't hurt me and I was safe.

I was drunk and or on drugs from my 20s until my 40s when my son was born. I didn't feel wanted. The church failed me. And my family failed me. I grew up alone. I was in survivor mode my entire life.

Physically, my collarbone was broken during a gang rape. I have c-PTSD, low self-esteem. I have COPD, emphysema, and diabetes. I have lifetime problems with interpersonal relationships, social gatherings, intimate relationships, and trust issues that lead to feeling not safe or secure.

Physical problems related to the abuse history include diarrhea, constipation, stomach issues, GERD, backaches. I am triggered at any moment. Socially, I was and am awkward, funny but mostly shy and quiet.

--Continued on next page

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

Continued from previous page--

I still isolate at home, only going out on errands or appointments. Always from point A to point B and then back home.

I have a loss of faith by the empty reaction from the diocese and all its members. Every interaction with the diocese turned out to be revictimizing. I was demeaned, ignored, lied to, embarrassed privately and publicly, insulted, yelled at, experienced an attempted bribe by a diocese lawyer, attacked publicly by the Bishop. All of these experiences reinforced the basic fears, insecurities, lack of trust - issues I've learned as a child and still experience today.

There's nothing church-like about the Catholic church. It's a business.

As a result of being revictimized, I hid again. I became invisible at work, hid from my family, friends, acquaintances. I don't answer the phone, I don't/can't ask for help. My trauma has broken me, and I have to again work with pieces of what could be and what might have been to rewire my brain. Literally.

The insensitivity, disrespect, and sanctimonious greater-than-though attitude against survivors has been humiliating. And their persistent efforts to cover up a pervert of their own is disgusting. Weldon was always just a pervert. Nothing more.

When you look at me now, you see a man, boldly standing, holding to account the very powerful, global entity who tried to obliterate my soul, denigrate my name, and sully my character. But I'm not just a man who endured. I stand on the shoulders of that little child, that absolute fucking warrior of a boy, who courageously chose to endure despite everything. Despite the horrors that humanity lashed through his body.

I am that boy. I carry him with me, always. The measure that I am proud of him is impossible to quantify. He took your violence, you shameful enablers who do nothing but cover up and perpetuate the cycle of systemic abuse. You call yourselves representatives of God - God has no place in anything you stand for. God is safety; God is nurturing; God is protection; God is Love. Ricky deserved each and every one of those things. Yet when he bravely used his voice to guide me in 2014, you tried to destroy him again.

But Ricky and I are still here, feet firmly planted, speaking his truth to your corruption and violence. I stand with him, as always, hand in hand, as we fight for some semblance of justice day after day, bravely trying to 'hold up our piece of the sky.'

I give you your Shame back.

I didn't do anything wrong.

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

How This Trauma Has Affected My Life

It took me two weeks to sit down and write this since [my attorney] called me to ask if I could write how this trauma has affected me. As I sit here in front of my computer, my heart is bounding with anxiety and my hands are shaking because of the constant reminder of this horrible crime that happened to me.

Before any of this happened, I was a very calm, quiet, and respectable boy. I was very good to my parents, my siblings, and everyone else that came into my life, and I excelled in school. I didn't have emotional problems at all. I attended church six times per week as an altar boy: Monday-Friday at 6:00 pm, and Sunday at 10:00 am

When priest S. started molesting me, I always thought that it was accidental, and I didn't think too much about it. He treated me like he was the Big Brother that I didn't have. He would come behind me quickly and unexpectedly and pick me up with one hand around my chest and the other hand holding my genitals. He would swing me side to side for fifteen seconds, more or less. Then he would put me right down on my feet and would start walking as though it was just a friendly, innocent and playful gesture while always telling me that I was a good boy. He also placed his hand on my genitals when I was in his car.

The very last time that I was in his presence was in the small building in the parking lot behind the rectory that I referred to as the printing room. I had just turned sixteen years old. At this time, I had a girlfriend and I was maturing as a young man. While I was sitting at a small table printing the names of parishioners on the weekly envelopes, he came behind me running his fingers through my long hair saying, "I love your hair," then he quickly kissed my neck.

I got up so fast and said as I was fleeing for the door, "I just remembered that my mother needs me at home." I was horrified now that I was older and much more mature, understanding what had just happened. I ran home so fast but never told my parents about the incident. That same night I couldn't sleep because everything was all coming together. All of the flashbacks of everything he did to me was obviously not accidental or in a friendly, brotherly, and innocent gesture. I stopped being an altar boy and I never went back to Santo Christo Church. I started having nightmares that I was in a shower with him. I was nude in a fetal position on the floor of the shower and he was nude standing up in front of me yelling at me to get up. I have had this same reoccurring nightmare for years. Sometimes this horrible nightmare comes to my mind even when I'm awake.

I became an emotional wreck thinking, what if someone finds out about this. I was so ashamed of myself for not realizing what was actually happening to me all along. I have kept this secret inside of my head for forty years until I contacted [my attorney].

I have developed this uncontrollable anger inside of me ever since I was sixteen years old.

--Continued on next page

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

Continued from previous page --

It has caused me to lose my faith in the Catholic Church, the Diocese of Fall River and the Vatican for allowing these horrors to happen all of these years to me and all of the other innocent victims, and doing nothing to stop it or prevent it from ever happening again. But at that time, I didn't realize this was happening to other boys. I thought it was just me. I never came forward with this earlier because I was afraid that I might have to face him again. Just the thought of that horrified me. I have been suffering with depression and anxiety because of the constant reminder that is always in my head. There isn't a day that goes by that there isn't something to remind me of him. This has caused me to turn to alcohol to ease my mind, and many times I have thought to end my life. I would think in careful detail of how to do it and then I break out in tears thinking, what am I doing? GOD help me.

I may have lost my faith in the Catholic church, but not in GOD. GOD didn't do this to me. Only a monster could commit such horrible atrocities. I'm very thankful to GOD for helping me to keep it all together. My anger has caused me to go through two failed marriages and it's taking a toll on my present marriage. I'm trying very hard to control my anger, but the nightmare is always in my head, especially at night when I lay down in bed. I have a very hard time sleeping because these horrifying images that keep coming to my mind over and over again. I see his face in my mind. It's like I can never get away from him. Many times, when I do fall asleep, I have nightmares reliving the horrors. My wife knows that I was molested, but she doesn't know about the daily horror that I go through. I thought many times to get some help through therapy, but I adopted and raised three of my granddaughters for fifteen years. They were in therapy to help deal with not living with their parents. It was a big waste of time. I cannot sit down and reveal all of my hurt and emotions to a total stranger. I can't do it with my wife who loves me and I know would support me, never mind someone else. Many times, when I'm thinking about everything that happened to me I start crying uncontrollably. I think to myself, if anyone saw me in this condition, they would probably say I need to be committed to a behavioral health hospital or be put on medication. I know it's depression.

It is very difficult for me to write all of this down and I'm sure there are some things that I'm leaving out. It is very embarrassing to be almost a sixty-two-year-old man that is an emotional wreck who cries uncontrollably. This has caused me to very angry and sometimes violent to my family and I am very sorry and ashamed for my behavior. This has also caused me to feel like a failure as a father to my children. I took out my frustration and anger on them, especially when I was drinking, and I drank to make it all go away. The slightest thing that anyone says to me that upsets me makes me angry instantly.

My wife keeps telling me I need help controlling this problem. This is causing me to feel like a failure as a husband because I keep doing it. I'm afraid she will leave me some day. This has also caused me to feel like I have no sense of self-worth.

--Continued on next page

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

Continued from previous page--

I have thought many times to reach out to my fellow altar boys to maybe start a therapy support group so that we can help each other, but I was always afraid that maybe none of them are aware of this and now my secret would be revealed.

I could not take the humiliation of them knowing about what happened to me without being victims themselves. I was always afraid that they would share my information with others in the community. This would be very embarrassing for me.

I hope that something will be done to stop these crimes from ever happening again to anyone. No one should be going through what I am going through. I want peace of mind. This is something that has been robbed from me for the past forty-six years. "PEACE OF MIND."

More public awareness needs to be put in place and it has to start at home with parents talking to their children. A child will almost never tell their parents if they were molested because of the fear and shame that their abuser will make them feel. It's also in most cases a loved one or someone that they know and respect. It's a horrifying trauma for any child to go through. I thank GOD I'm still here.

I believe that more pressure has to be placed upon the Catholic church to put a stop to this once and for all. The Diocese of Fall River must be held responsible and accountable for its role in trying to cover up these crimes instead of stopping them.

-Anonymous Male

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

June 6, 2022

I'm writing this to describe as accurately and fully as possible, the effects of the sexual trauma I suffered because of being sodomized by James Porter 60 years ago.

I feel that a primary effect has been emotional flashbacks of my abuse. By this I mean that over the many years of most of my memory being repressed, I would often feel trapped and frightened in my adult life, the same as I felt all those years ago when I was a 9-year-old boy. The result of this is that I often feel trapped, even when my present circumstances didn't warrant the feelings; no present-day logical cause. Essentially, I feel that this was that trapped and frightened little boy working in my subconscious mind. A real-world effect of this is that I've often been unable to assert myself in workplaces when dealing with workplace bullying and manipulating. Following along with this is that, in spite of being intelligent and diligent, I've never been able to develop a professional career. Over the many years, I've attempted to develop careers as a therapist and schoolteacher, both times very unsuccessfully. Not only has this affected my earning capability, it's also affected my feelings of self-worth.

Another result of my abuse is that I've often felt a sense of emotional chaos and disconnection from myself and other people. The end result of this is that I've never been able to develop strong relationships with the people in my life. I've often felt feelings of personal inadequacy because of this. Presently, I live an isolated life, with very little social contact, and no close relationships. This gives me many negative feelings, in the way of trust and feelings of deep resentment as to the injustice that I've suffered.

It's only been about 2 years since I've begun therapy, from which I've been able to retrieve a considerable amount of memory of my abuse accurately. I have deep feelings of despair when I think of all the years I lived with almost no conscious memory of the abuse; all that time that I can never go back and make up for, in the way of a much better career and closer meaningful relationships. In spite of trying hard to live an aggressively good life, I'm often plagued by strong feelings of despair, resentment, and sadness. My life has been intensely damaged as a result of being sexually abused all those years ago. That damage is in all aspects of my life: emotional, financial, personal and also in the way of physical. By physical, I mean that I now have flashbacks in the way of muscle pain from the abuse. Specifically, I sporadically feel sudden pain in my trunk rotator muscles, which is pain expressed during my struggle 60 years ago twisting and turning while being bent over by James Porter while he sodomized me. About 1 year ago I had a colonoscopy ordered by my primary care physician to rule out gastrointestinal cause. Colonoscopy was negative, which didn't surprise me. In spite of the good news of negative colonoscopy, I need to admit that the muscle pains are still somewhat frightening to me. On the average, they last 20-30 minutes; I use a variety of techniques relative to exercise and physical therapy to help relieve them. The fact is, I can never predict when the pains will happen; no definite trigger, so to speak. This is what makes it frightening to me, as well as sometimes feeling deep resentment as to why the pains are happening.

--Continued on next page

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

Continued from previous page--

Another effect I feel is deep resentment at the fact that there are several people, many of them Roman Catholics, who minimize the pain I feel. I feel alienated from many people because of knowing this; it adds to my feelings of social isolation. This is the best way I can describe the effects of my abuse. To say it simply, it's the effects of having that trapped, frightened, and humiliated little boy from 60 years ago having sneaked up on me in my subconscious mind for many years; kind of like an unknown enemy ambushing me and making me vulnerable to failures and indignity not in my control. I see myself as somebody who's lived almost all of my life with an undiagnosed disability. Even though I now have a better idea as to what happened to me, it's too late to go back all those years and compensate for them. I feel deep resentment as to the injustice done to me. The abuse I suffered has prevented me from living a fuller life. I wanted to contribute to society in general with strong abilities. I was prevented from doing that.

-Anonymous Male

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

James Kearns, Fall River – Impact Statement

June 8, 2022

Over several years, on numerous occasions, priest M. used his power as a priest and close relationship with my parents to sexually abuse me.

The first time priest M. abused me was when I was 8 or 9 years old. Priest M. was visiting my parents at home, along with Bishop Connolly, the Bishop of the Fall River Diocese, and other priests, all close friends of my father. (Bishop Connolly, priest M., various priests, Monsignors were frequent visitors to our home).

This particular day, I was sick in bed with a fever. Priest M. came into my bedroom, told me my mom asked him to check on me. He sat next to me on my bed, started kissing me on the forehead, lips, saying “God loves you. And I love you, too.” He then grabbed my penis, stroking it. I froze, numb, terrified, blacked out. When I recalled this some years later, I was traumatized, fearing what else he may have done to me.

The second time was when I was a fourth or fifth grade student at Sacred Heart Elementary School. Priest M. was a parish priest at Sacred Heart Church and often visited the school, which was located across the street from the church. By then, my parents allowed me to walk to and from school. One day, as school was letting out, priest M. was parked outside in his car. He offered to drive me home. I didn’t want to go, but he insisted.

On the way home, priest M. stopped the car. He said he wanted to show me something. He opened his glove compartment, pulled out an adult magazine with photos of naked women. As he turned the pages, he stroked the inside of my thigh, asking if I was getting excited. Once again, I went numb, nauseous, too scared to tell him to stop. I remember him saying not to tell my father, something like, “You know what a temper he has. I wouldn’t want him to hurt you.”

Before these two incidents, I had near perfect attendance in school. I suddenly started getting sick more often: sharp pains in my stomach, fevers, vomiting, frequent nightmares. Even when I was feeling better, I would stick my finger down my throat and try to vomit so my mom wouldn’t force me to go to school where I was afraid I’d run into priest M.

My mother took me to see the family doctor who discovered I had developed a peptic ulcer and was bleeding internally. The doctor asked if anything was bothering me; having problems at home, school. With my mom in the room, I pretended everything was fine.

Up to this point, I was a straight A student. By the time I entered my freshman year in high school, I started to act out, angry at authority figures, causing trouble, rebellious. A’s became C’s, D’s, sometimes F’s. I felt what priest M. did was my fault. My parents were devout Catholics. They worshipped priests. I couldn’t tell them what he’d done because they never would have believed me.

--Continued on next page

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

Continued from previous page--

I had nowhere to turn, so I turned on myself. Hated myself. Felt like a failure. Went out of my way to prove I was just that.

My grades were so poor, I was forced to repeat 9th grade, which made me angrier, more of a troublemaker. I managed to graduate high school, but my self-destructive streak continued in college. I flunked out of Manhattan College, a Christian Brothers college in New York City. Because of priest M., I no longer trusted priests, religious brothers. I feared them. I transferred to Franklin Pierce College in New Hampshire. I was so depressed I barely attended classes; dropped out before the end of the first semester.

My relationship with my father was not good. I had long quit being an altar boy, stopped going to church, refused to kneel and kiss the Bishop's ring when he visited. I decided to leave home, found an apartment in Providence, R.I., transferred the few good credits I had and enrolled at Rhode Island College and sold magazines door-to-door to pay my way. This was sometime around 1969-1970.

When classes ended, I got a summer job as a lifeguard at Craigville Beach in Centerville, Massachusetts on Cape Cod, fully intending to return to R.I. College to pursue a degree. One day at the beach, I heard someone call my name: "Hey, [name]!" It was priest M., now in his 50's or 60's, wearing black swim trunks, big smile, acting like one of the guys, joking around, making lewd comments about women's bodies, breasts, totally bizarre behavior.

He told me he'd been assigned to a church in Centerville. I think it was Our Lady of Victory, which was not far from the beach. He told me that my father asked him to check up on me, see how I was doing. At some point later, he invited me to dinner. I refused. He insisted, said he wanted to help make things right between my father and me. I wanted nothing more than to repair my relationship my dad, so I reluctantly agreed to meet priest M.

The drive to the restaurant was tense. I remember priest M. making small talk; how much I'd grown, how good I looked. He liked the light summer jacket I was wearing and began rubbing the sleeve, which made me very uncomfortable. Suddenly, he pulled off the road, lunging aggressively, pinning me against the passenger door, kissing me, trying to tongue me, unzip my pants, completely out of control.

I was older now, stronger. I pushed him away, trembling, furious. "What the hell do you think you're doing?"

Priest M. suddenly started to cry, weeping inconsolably, pleading with me not to tell my father. "Please, please don't tell your father." My emotions were raw. Fear, anger, shame, simultaneously hating and pitying him.

--Continued on next page

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

Continued from previous page--

A few days later my mother called me, very upset. She told me Father Ray (how she referred to him) had a nervous breakdown and was sent to a sanitarium somewhere. My mother was very close to priest M., so I didn't tell her what he had done. Once again, I blamed myself, ridden with guilt that this latest, more violent sexual assault, like his other assaults was my fault. Had I not gotten sick all those years ago when he entered my bedroom, gotten into the car with him outside Sacred Heart school, agreed to go to dinner with him, none of this ever would have happened.

I was so shaken, so angry, disgusted, ashamed that I allowed him to abuse me again, I never returned to Rhode Island College. Never even informed the college I wasn't coming back. I never told my parents, siblings, friends, anyone about what priest M. did. Instead, I left the country.

Years later, after I returned to the U.S., the anger, self-hatred, shame, guilt, self-destructiveness was so overwhelming that I became very depressed. I felt worthless, near paralyzed with shame, anger, self-doubt, self-hatred, depression, anxiety, suicidal thoughts. I took drugs, sabotaged job opportunities, abandoned friends, girlfriends. I tried a bit of acting in New York, was offered the lead role in a well-known play, never responded to the offer, worked a bunch of meaningless jobs; moved aimlessly from one city to another.

Priest M.'s abuse was so hurtful and damaging that I developed a fear of sexual intimacy, which contributed in some degree to the end of my marriage. There were many times I wanted to end my life.

As the depression, self-hatred, continued, I somehow managed to drag myself to the outpatient psychiatry department at Cambridge Memorial Hospital. This was around 1974. Subsequently, I spent many years and tens of thousands of dollars in therapy, trying to restore faith in myself.

Had I never had the misfortune to meet priest M., I know for certain my life would be very different. I would have excelled at school, graduated from a good college or university, pursued my chosen career years earlier, gotten a head start financially, which would have afforded me greater opportunities to make a better living to support my family.

For over sixty years, I blamed myself for priest M.'s abuse. This impact statement allows me to finally place the blame where it belongs – on priest M. and the Diocese of Fall River.

Priest M. was a criminal. His malicious, predatory behavior was repeatedly ignored and covered up by the Fall River Diocese, Archdiocese of Boston, and the Roman Catholic Church. Instead of being protected and transferred from one parish to another, priest M. should have been arrested, convicted in a court of law, and sent to prison.

--Continued on next page

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

Continued from previous page--

Priest M. died a free man. Unfortunately, for me and all the innocent children victimized by priest M. and these predacious, so-called 'Men of God,' we will never be wholly free from the enormous pain we were forced to carry throughout our lives.

Even now, as I write this, the anger, guilt, shame rises up, still resides within. Being sexually abused stays with you your entire life.

So that this doesn't continue to happen in the future, I respectfully ask the Governor and legislative bodies of the state of Massachusetts to enact laws that will punish religious sexual abusers in the same way as convicted sex offenders are held accountable for their crimes.

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

Edna Wallace

June 5, 2022

My name is Edna Louise Wallace. I am 63 years old. I reside in Allegheny County, VA. My mother worked as a maid to raise us children by herself. We lived in grandmother's house, we did not have running water or in house plumbing.

Mother started getting sick with cancer and we moved to Massachusetts. A few years later, my mother got very sick and passed away. My brother and I were nine years old at that time and we were put in Mt. Saint Ann's Orphanage with Sister Marie. Females are sent there until they become a young female, when that happens you're sent to Sister Marie's care. That is where I lost my innocence. She did ungodly things to me. A child sent there was supposed to be raised and protected, that's not what happen to me. Sister Marie took advantage of me, she kept me locked in a room that was supposed to be punishment. I tried to kill myself twice.

No one would help. No one would help.

I was so afraid of her I hated to see nighttime coming. She would come into my room and do sexual acts to me and force me to do to her. I was punished, put off by myself, which made it easy for her to do these things. I asked if I could be put in the room with the other four girls or someone put in room with me, and Sister Marie never answered me.

I was put in a wonderful foster home, but I couldn't leave the horrors of that room behind. I was taken to the doctors they ran tests, put me on medications. I first shut down and told no one. I did not trust people, I felt ashamed.

Upon leaving the foster home I began using drugs to hide the pain, I did not know what I was looking for at sixteen. I began having sex, became pregnant with my first child, but did not know how to be a mother. I wish I had known how. I went to a good Catholic school at first. I was learning but after the times with Sister Marie, I ran away from all the good things in life. I just shut down.

In the last twenty years I finally came to terms, I got away from using drugs. I went to therapy. I just have to keep living with the demons, taking my medications and therapy. The nun, Sister Marie, is living free and I am trapped with the memories, the fears. I snap easily at people even though I don't mean to. My grandchildren are saving me. I look at them and wonder how someone could do those things to a child.

I wish I had spoken up. I don't want any other child to go through what I went and am still going through the flashbacks of horror.

Edna Wallace

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

VICTIM IMPACT STATEMENT:

Sexual and Physical Abuse of a Minor by Priest P. of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Fall River, and Subsequent Cover-Up by Officials of the Diocese.

Statement by John D. Golenski for the Office of the Massachusetts Attorney General

August 22, 2022

Physical Damage

Although the most-recently documented, the physical damage to my reproductive organs has been almost life-long. Priest P. sexually abused me in several locations in St. Kilian's Church in New Bedford in the spring of 1961 and at Cathedral Camp in Freetown during an altar boys' day during the summer of 1961. On Holy Saturday, April 1, 1961, after a rehearsal for the Easter Vigil Mass scheduled for later that evening, priest P. dismissed the altar boys but told me to remain with him in the Sacristy. He was a large, strong man who pushed me against the Sacristy wall with his body. He grabbed my testicles with one hand, squashing them while masturbating with his other hand. I was in extreme pain, crying and begging him to stop. When he finished, he told me to go home and that what happened was under the Seal of the Confessional. I was to tell no one. I limped home and told no one. My genitalia were severely bruised and painful for several weeks.

During the following autumn and winter, my parents became concerned that I was not showing signs of puberty and brought me to a general practitioner in New Bedford, Dr. Pellerin, who prescribed weekly hormone replacement injections over several months. These did not seem to help completely, although secondary sex characteristics did appear. My body took a feminine shape, and I was described as having "hypogonadism".

Decades later, in my fifties, I was diagnosed with testosterone insufficiency by my primary care provider in San Francisco. In an attempt to protect me against osteoporosis, he prescribed another series of testosterone supplements, which again showed almost no positive impact. Finally, toward the end of 2021, I was referred to Dr. Stephanie Seminara, a research endocrinologist at Mass General, who did a thorough analysis of my hormonal situation. She documented that I have no genetic disorder and that my parathyroid is functioning normally. But my testes are producing almost no testosterone. Having exhausted all other explanations, she asked if I had ever experienced trauma to my testicles. I finally made the connection and revealed to her my history of abuse.

I will never father a child. I could never father a child although that is not how God made me. Besides the psychological and interpersonal damage I have suffered from the episode of sexual abuse, priest P. destroyed my capacity for reproduction and, as a result of testosterone insufficiency made me susceptible to bone fractures, chronic anemia, and cardio/pulmonary damage.

--Continued on next page

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

Continued from previous page--

Emotional Damage

It is difficult to express in words how profound an impact priest P's crime has wrought in my life. Besides eliminating my reproductive capacity, the permanent damage to my genitalia and, thus, to my physical development in general, left me with a life-long experience of feeling (and thinking) like a man in my consciousness but with little capacity to function like a man.

In addition, I have had all the maladies associated with a history of being sexually abused. I have survived by deploying dissociation. I have had a life-long drive to avoid committed relationships and suffer the predictable anxiety. I never feel safe in any context always looking for an exit. Occasionally throughout my life I have used self-harming behaviors to manage my anxiety.

Financial Impact

Besides the obvious need for counseling and psychotherapy (which has literally, at times, been life-saving) and the consequent expenses never covered by health insurance, there has been a chronic inability to commit to a job within a large organization with its associated benefits and security. I have spent an enormous amount of my income over decades for therapy. In addition, I have a self-destructive strategy to avoid positions where I would have accumulated resources for retirement.

The Impact of Betrayal

This is most difficult to describe and quantify, but it is nonetheless real. My basic faith, the kind of trust in parents and authority figures (religious leaders, teachers, coaches) was destroyed. I walked into that Sacristy in Holy Week of 1961 a typical kid in a Catholic parish/school, trusting that the Universe makes sense and that I would make a good life in it, and I left it several hours later, a damaged person who can never really trust again. How do we measure that loss?

Final Comment

Thanks to whoever has decided to investigate and document what was done to me and so many others in the Diocese of Fall River. And thanks for whatever recommendations for improved protections will come forth from this work. But, I can never forget that the perpetrator is still free, at large, having never faced criminal prosecution. Worse, so many men, and some women, who allowed, enabled, and protected so many perpetrators continue to enjoy the prestige and perks of power they have not used to protect those in their care.

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

June 15, 2021

Anonymous female

I had no voice as a child. I learned to be invisible. That's how I survived Fr. B.

To be told over and over that I was useless and God's biggest mistake. All girls had no worth.

I never had friends at St. J Ark. No one dared to speak to each other. There were big secrets, but silent secrets. As I continued through my grade school years, I just wanted to survive. I didn't know it at the time, but deep down I knew there had to be something different than just sadness, guilt, and a dark world of darkness.

I have since lost my faith in God and the Church. God never listened. I was constantly brought to the lowest times in my life. I lost my relationship with my parents. They were not there for me and did not protect me. I was just alone in my personal torment. There was no speaking of this to anyone.

I was pregnant the day I graduated. I wanted this baby very much. A little one who would need me and love me uncontestedly. I then had my son who is also all mine. I was a widow by the time I was 22 and a single mom of two little ones. Again, abandoned by someone I loved. The unending sadness continues to be in my heart and life. Not knowing it at the time, I was fighting for my life. Consumed by no self-worth. Being a local person living in a small community, I was continuing to be triggered by the sight of him. It was like there was no air to take in.

One of the most upsetting was when my mother sought out Fr. B. to officiate my young sister's funeral. I am so angry still that he stood over my sister and blessed her.

I have survived this weakness long enough. This has not been a very good time in my life addressing this. I suffer from depression, anxiety, agoraphobia, sexual dysfunction, alcoholism and drugs and my body is just wearing down from all of this stress and sadness and frozen with despair.

So please hear me now, this man has altered my life significantly.

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

8.21.2022

Daniel Lewis

I grew up with two active alcoholic parents. My mom used to drink with other drunks. Two of her drinking guys befriended me at a young age. Those two then molested me. After it was said and done, they said if I ever told anyone, they would kill me. I wanted to shout it out to the world. I didn't know how and, of course, was full of disgrace and shame. I did not tell my father because he would beat my mother or, worse, shoot them both. Which would have been a good thing for them.

At this time, I was involved with St. Paul's in Taunton. At that time, I always felt safe and good with the church. The church always felt like a safe haven for me, due to all the chaos at home. There was an incident where I had to call the police because my stepdad was beating my mother. The chief of police told me, when you turn 18, I want you to come see me and become a police officer. That was one of my proudest nights of my life. Anyhow, maybe I was looking for an adult to look up to.

I had known Father B. for a while, and I told him one morning that I was going to become a cop. B. told me that he used to work for the FBI, and that is where the trust for B. began.

I had already been molested by my mom's two drunk friends, and I told B. that I thought I had committed a sin. I told him the story and how it made me feel. Sometime later, my mom sent me and my sister to talk to B. We walked to St. Paul's and to this day, I do not recall what the three of us talked about. The next thing I knew, B. was serving my sister and me wine for the blood of Christ. I remember that because I liked the way it melted in my mouth. My sister and I got intoxicated, and I don't remember what happened after that. The next time that I met up with B. was at the morning Sunday service. At the end of the sermon, we were leaving when B. pulled me aside and asked if I could help him with a situation at his cottage the following weekend. I said I would.

Upon arriving at the cottage on the lake, B. walked me down to the edge of the lake and showed me a capsized canoe, about twenty feet from shore. I remember all the leaves floating on top of the water. I entered the water and waded out to about belly-deep. I managed to right the canoe and pull it up and out of the lake, cleaning debris out of the hull. I was soaking wet from my chest down to my feet, and full of mud up to my knees. Once inside the cottage, I remember B. saying, "Let's get you out of those wet clothes." I did feel uncomfortable, uneasy about that, also embarrassed. B. undid my pants and removed them, as well as my shirt, and rubbed my body down with a towel, including the groin area and legs. I did not like that. I took the towel away and dried myself off.

B. then got a blanket and he draped it up and over my shoulders. I was really uncomfortable and becoming suspicious.

--Continued on next page

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

Continued from previous page--

Relative to what happened to me before with my mom's drunk guy friends, I should have trusted my instincts. I felt that something was not right, but I trusted B. and believed I was safe. I sat down with just the blanket over me with nothing on underneath. B. began to show me how to play Chinese checkers. As I was playing the game, he made me a hot liquid, maybe tea, and told me it would take the chill out of me. I sipped the drink because it was hot. That much I remember. I did feel woozy after a while. I don't remember much after that. It was like a grey out. I would come and go out, as if drunk. When I came to, I remember him touching me in the most inappropriate way, rubbing my inner thighs, then putting his mouth down on my private part. I pushed him away and let him know that it was wrong. While in and out of the fog, I remember B. giving me my clothes. My clothes were damp and wrinkled and I dressed while using the blanket because I felt dirty and ashamed. Only God knows what B. did to me when I was out. I only can say what I remember a lot of my memory was and still is in bits and pieces. This part is very difficult to write and think about. I remember being very afraid, scared and trembling. I also remember being out of it that whole day. That day just reminded me of what happened before. Now who could I trust and tell? So I buried that secret until now.

Part of me died that day. I felt like if I told someone, maybe they would do that to me again. I really had faith in this person called a priest or father, a man of God. I thought of telling the chief of police, but I thought he would then think less of me and I wouldn't be able to become a police officer. So, for 50+ years, I kept it a secret. Writing this makes my mind confused and cloudy. My heart as well as my spirit surges with anger, mistrust.

That was the last time that I went to St. Paul's Church. Every Sunday after that I would pretend I was going to service. Instead, I would go down to the river, change out of my church clothes, put on my outside playing clothes and go fishing until the service was done. Then I would change back into my church clothes, plastic wrap my old clothes, and hide them for the next Sunday. I continued this until B. asked my mom why I wasn't attending church. My mom asked why. I said I don't want to. She got angry, so I told her to go to church. She responded with a slap in the face.

I never went back to St. Paul's Church. I have always called St. Paul's the devil's den, where evil prevails. I have tried other churches (Baptist), but every time I walk into the church, it reminds me of B. and that deceiving smile. I will always and every day wake up with his face in my mind. I did get married in a Catholic church. "Not my decision" when I had to give "the devil" \$200 for the service. I did drink during the marriage service. All I could feel was clear and evil presence. My spiritual path has been with the Native American Pagans. The nature, woods, river, ocean is my church, where I pray now. And he or she is a Great God.

The only person that I believed in was B., a trusted figure of goodness and God. When I told him what had happened to me with the other two pedophiles, I asked for forgiveness for I thought that I had sinned.

--Continued on next page

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

Continued from previous page--

The abuse has impacted me in so many ways: poor grades, fights in school, feeling like a bad seed, sadness, nightmares, trouble with the law, failed marriages, promiscuity, issues with drugs and alcohol, feelings of inadequacy, anger, lack of trust, employment problems, expulsion from school.

I went to prison for over two years for assaulting a gay person when that person made advances towards me, and I said no. My mind went to seeing those three pedophiles, including B.'s face, which will be etched in my mind forever. That anger and rage bottled out through my heart and spirit. I promised myself and God that will never happen to me again.

I hate to say this, but maybe prison saved my life from the road of destruction. A lot of people, including law enforcement, parole officers, etc. were able to see the good in me when I couldn't. I did stop saying sorry a long time ago, for people were telling me to quit apologizing. While at Concord (MCI), I did receive my G.E.D./pre-college, and, in 1990, I graduated with an associate's degree with honors from Franklin Institute of Technology in Boston. I decided to study at Boston Architecture Center for my Master's but left because I was unable to secure a career due to being a convicted felon and on parole. I also took auto mechanic classes while at the Plymouth Forestry Camp and then just accepted that was the best I could do to earn a decent salary. I still owe \$30,000+ for school loans, which I am trying to get forgiven. That education was like buying a brand-new Jeep and never being able to drive it.

I did pray to God to use my hand to write this as a tool. I will continue to put pen to paper and sit down with a therapist and maybe I can learn to look into the mirror again and learn to love myself.

Appendix 2: Resource Organizations

The Mission of BishopAccountability.org and Our Archive

BishopAccountability.org is a digital and brick-and-mortar archive of the Catholic clergy abuse crisis; the staff also does basic research. We establish assignment histories of accused clergy and religious, maintain a database of accused, and track the lists of accused that the dioceses and religious orders have published. Our Database of Accused in the United States comprises more than 7,500 records as of August 8, 2022.

Our website makes publicly available more than 63,630 pages of church files; over 121,000 news articles; a collection of investigative and other reports and studies totaling more than 100,000 pages; and over 1,880 archived copies of lists of accused, created by more than 150 dioceses and more than 25 religious institutes and provinces.

Our physical archive includes 243,770 pages of publicly released church files; over a million pages of other church files; the Demarest Archive of accused persons totaling more than 25,880 sources; and the Podles Archive of diocesan and topic files totaling 157 linear feet. Lee Podles and the late Richard Sipe, scholars of clergy abuse, also donated to BishopAccountability.org their libraries of books about the clergy abuse problem and related issues.

Survivors' Oral Histories and Our Work in Massachusetts

We are based in Waltham, Massachusetts. Our Boston archive of 46,969 pages was the first we started acquiring and is one of the largest in our collection. We also have significant holdings about the Worcester, Springfield, and Fall River dioceses.

Our oral history project initially focused on the stories of Massachusetts survivors, and we are actively collecting oral histories in Massachusetts and nationwide. Survivors in Massachusetts who would like their stories preserved are welcome to contact us at staff@bishop-accountability.org, or to call Terry McKiernan, who is directing the project, at 508-479-9304. We would be happy to schedule a video or audio interview. Survivors have also entrusted to us their clipping collections and their own archives of documents, either to complement their oral history or as a standalone archival donation. Our goal is to collect and preserve the most detailed possible record of clergy abuse in Massachusetts and in the United States. Survivors are the most important source of this precious information.

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

Voice of the Faithful

Voice of the Faithful is a lay organization formed in January 2002 in response to the sexual abuse scandals in the Catholic Church. The mission of the organization is “to provide a prayerful voice, attentive to the Spirit, through which the Faithful can actively participate in the governance and guidance of the Catholic Church.”

VOTF remains committed to working *within* the Church and to providing support to victims/survivors of clergy sexual abuse, to supporting priests of integrity, and to helping shape structural change within the Catholic Church through active lay involvement.

Voice of the Faithful brings together informed Catholics to pursue efforts that promote our mission and goals and ensure the transparency and accountability of our diocesan and parish administrations. We speak out on issues of concern to all Catholics and ask questions about Church structures that so clearly failed to protect the faithful.

In 2022, Voice of the Faithful published the first independent, online review of all U.S. Roman Catholic dioceses’ level of compliance with child protection and safe environment guidelines. The latest report is available at: <https://www.votf.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/VOTF-Child-Protect-Report-2023-web.pdf>.

As we note in the report, the breadth of clergy sexual abuse cases within the Church indicates that historical responses to accusations of abuse by the hierarchy were inadequate. Those responses aimed to protect the reputation of the institution rather than support victims and prevent further child abuse within the Church. The question is, do the policies enacted since 2002 successfully protect children in the Church today and guard against future sex abuse of children? Under the auspices of Voice of the Faithful, researchers examined the websites of all 177 dioceses and archdioceses in the United States and scored each on the content and policies concerning protection of children.

Results of this Review indicate the need to enhance diocesan child protection policies and safe environment measures. Voice of the Faithful also notes that actions by all are essential to keep children safe in our church communities. Clearly stated, publicly available, and comprehensive diocesan guidelines for safe environments provide measurable standards that can be modeled in parishes and are essential to prevent further child abuse.

Mindful of the degree to which U.S. bishops covered up secret payments (“hush money”) for decades to families of abused children, Voice of the Faithful also has worked consistently to support increased transparency and accountability for Church finances at the parish and the diocesan levels. Since 2017 Voice of the Faithful has published annual Reports on Measuring and Ranking Diocesan Financial Transparency: ([Latest Report: 2025](#)) This can help ensure that the lack of diocesan financial transparency will not enable new coverups of clerical sexual abuse.

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests (SNAP)

[Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests](#)

SNAP is a self-help peer program which assists survivors in coming to terms with their abuse, acknowledging it and finding ways to cope and to receive help in overcoming difficulties in their lives resulting from that abuse.

Although the name of the organization specifically appeals to those harmed by priests, SNAP also helps people who have been harmed by other religious and/or institutional authority figures, such as ministers, nuns, coaches, teachers, deacons, bishops, rabbis, and more.

Survivors can reach SNAP at [Contact – Survivor’s Network of those Abused by Priests](#) or leave a voicemail or text message at 1-202-802-8611.

Survivors who are not ready to speak about their experiences to another person do not have to talk to anyone to access SNAP’s resources and tools, which include a support group directory and a resources page for survivors, as well as access to other survivors’ stories, all accessible at [Resources for Survivors - Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests](#).

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

Appendix 3: The House of Affirmation in the Worcester Diocese

During its existence as a treatment center from 1973 to 1989, the House of Affirmation amassed vast real estate holdings, including a large mansion and several other lots and properties in Whitinsville, Hopedale, and Northborough, an inn and farm in Maine, three condominiums in Boston, and two condominiums in Florida. Some of these locations became franchises of the House of Affirmation, which at one point, had additional facilities in Hopedale, Boston, and Natick, as well as in Middletown, Connecticut, Montara, California, Webster Groves, Missouri, and Clearwater, Florida. Starting in the mid- to late 1980s, however, evidence of financial malfeasance on the part of its co-founder, Thomas Kane, came to light, leading to his termination in 1987.¹²⁰ Kane sold some of the House of Affirmation's real estate holdings to reimburse the Worcester Diocese. A property in the Fenway in Boston sold for \$2,000,000 and another on Woodland Street in Natick for \$3,525,000.¹²¹ Kane was later accused of embezzling funds of the House of Affirmation.¹²² He filed for bankruptcy in 1989.

The House of Affirmation closed its doors as a treatment center in 1989. Yet, it never completely ceased to exist. Unraveling many of the events that occurred at the House of Affirmation and identifying priests who received treatment there is made more difficult by the fact that, in 1992, the House of Affirmation adopted a schedule for the destruction of its records that was completed by 1997. To this day, the House of Affirmation, Inc., continues in operation with its principal office at the address of the chancery of the Worcester Diocese. Its board of directors includes the bishop and diocesan managers. In October 2002, the House of Affirmation, Inc., through its officers, which included Bishop Daniel P. Reilly, filed "Restated Articles of Organization" with the Secretary of State's Office, including in its corporate purpose the intent to operate as a residential or outpatient therapeutic treatment center for the "treatment and care of present and former members of the clergy, ministry, and religious communities who suffer from emotional, mental, and spiritual disorders and to victims of alleged abuse in their

¹²⁰ See Wilfred Pilette, *Two Houses Fallen*, 12 Human Dev. Magazine, vol. 12, no. 3 (1991).

¹²¹ Suffolk County Registry of Deeds: the House of Affirmation had purchased the property at 22 Fenway in Boston for \$760,000 in 1983. Middlesex County Registry of Deeds Records: the House of Affirmation had purchased the property in Natick for \$1,000,000 in 1985.

¹²² Kane eventually left the country to teach English as a second language in Mexico.

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

families.”¹²³ According to senior diocesan officials, since 2002, the House of Affirmation has not functioned as a treatment center, but has used its funds to pay other institutions for providing psychological counseling for priests and members of religious orders as well as for psychological evaluations of prospective seminarians. According to the same officials, the House of Affirmation’s current funds have been obtained solely through the sale of its real estate holdings, which, in addition to the above-mentioned sale of two properties in the 1980s, include sales of holdings in and around Whitinsville (Northbridge), Hopedale, and Upton since the late 1980s. Its large mansion was sold for \$800,000 in 2012, and the last unimproved parcel of land was sold for \$220,500 in 2020.¹²⁴

For the past seven or eight years, the House of Affirmation has also used its funds to pay directly for the treatment of victims of clergy child sexual abuse, and, in certain cases, priests accused of sexual abuse in the Worcester Diocese. Victims of clergy child sexual abuse in the Worcester Diocese and their therapists have received checks bearing the name of the House of Affirmation. This experience has been upsetting to victims because of the direct role the House of Affirmation played in hosting abusive priests and facilitating clergy child sexual abuse in the Worcester Diocese and because of the notorious reputation it achieved in the process. In August of 2023, in response to this investigation, the bishop and those responsible for the corporation changed the name of the House of Affirmation, Inc., to Guild of St. Dymphna, Inc., a name that is not directly associated with the sexual abuse of children and young people by members of the clergy. It is laudable that the Diocese of Worcester is paying for therapy for at least some of the victims of clergy child sexual abuse at the hands of Worcester priests.

At the former House of Affirmation in Whitinsville, victims of clergy child sexual abuse have taken it into their own hands to raise awareness and foster their healing process. The mansion in Whitinsville has been transformed into Estate of Mind, a “community of creatives, artists, and makers, with a focus on collaborative projects and events.”¹²⁵ In 2022, it hosted a screening of filmmaker Skip Shea’s feature-length movie “Trinity.” “Trinity” is based on Shea’s own experiences and the setbacks in his recovery he suffered when he encountered the priest

¹²³ Articles of Incorporation, on file with the Massachusetts Secretary of State’s Office.

¹²⁴ Worcester Registry of Deeds.

¹²⁵ ESTATE OF MIND, <https://www.est8ofmind.com/>.

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

who had abused him for years in Uxbridge and at the House of Affirmation, at a local bookstore where the priest was working. The screening at the former House of Affirmation served as a benefit for Bishop-Accountability.org. On March 1, 2024, the mansion in Whitinsville suffered significant damage during a fire.¹²⁶

¹²⁶ *Id.*

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

Appendix 4: Glossary of Terms

Altar server	A child who acts as a priest's assistant during a church service.
Auxiliary Bishop	A bishop assigned to a Catholic diocese or archdiocese to assist its residential bishop. Whether in a diocese or archdiocese, his title is bishop.
Bishop	The highest order of ordained ministry in Catholic teaching. Diocesan bishops and their auxiliaries are responsible for the pastoral care of their dioceses.
Brother	Member of a religious community of men, not ordained as a priest, living under vows of poverty, celibacy, and obedience.
Canon Law	A code of ecclesiastical laws governing the Catholic Church; something having to do with these laws is referred to as "canonical."
Canonical Process	Procedures following canon law.
Cardinal	Highest-ranking Catholic clergy below the pope. By church law, cardinals are regarded as the pope's closest advisors.
Celebret	A document issued pursuant to canon law by a bishop or superior of a religious order that allows a priest to obtain permission to celebrate Mass in another diocese and certifies the priest is free from punishment under church law.
Celibacy	For a priest, this refers to a decision to live chastely in an unmarried state.
Chancellor	Chief archivist of a diocese's official records; a chancellor may act as a bishop's secretary or assistant and may have a variety of other duties.

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

Chancery	Administrative office of the diocese.
CCD	“Confraternity of Christian Doctrine;” religious education program for children in the Catholic Church.
CDF	“Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith;” administrative body, seated at the Vatican, responsible for safeguarding the church’s doctrine on faith and morals. In 2022, it was renamed “Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith.”
Clergy	A collective term referring to all those ordained who administer the rites of the church, including bishops, priests, and deacons.
“Clergy Monitor”	Priest whose duty included supervising priests on leave due to sexual abuse allegations; also referred to as “priest monitor.”
Code of Canon Law	“CIC” (from the Latin phrase: “Codes Iuris Canonici”); the fundamental body of laws governing the Roman Catholic Church; the current Code of Canon Law was established in 1983, replacing the version from 1917.
Corporation Sole	Corporation, often related to a church, in which one person and their successors are granted the status of a corporation to ensure continuity of property ownership.
Curate	Priest working as assistant to a parish priest.
Deacon	An ordained member of clergy who assists the priests; unlike priests, deacons can be married at the time of their ordination.
Deaneries	Territorial districts within a diocese.
Diocese	The ordinary territorial jurisdiction of the church headed by a bishop.

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

Diocesan priest	A priest who normally serves within the boundaries of diocese under the authority of his bishop.
Eparch	The ordinary of an eparchy.
Faculties	Church authorization, given by the law itself or by a church superior, to perform certain official church acts.
Father	Title used to address a priest.
Holy See	The primary official term of reference for the Diocese of Rome, as the chief diocese of Catholic Christendom; it is headed by the Pope and located in Vatican City, Rome, Italy; sometimes referred to as “the Vatican” or “Rome.”
Incardination	Process by which a bishop formally accepts a priest into a diocese.
Laicization (involuntary)	“Dismissal from the clerical state;” involuntary loss of all rights and obligation associated with ordination; occurs as a punishment after a canonical trial.
Laicization (voluntary)	“Dispensation from the clerical state;” voluntary return to the lay state; granted by the pope in response to a request from the cleric.
Mass	The central act of worship in the Catholic Church; only a priest or bishop can lead or “celebrate” Mass.
Ministry	Broadly, any activity conducive to the salvation of souls, including liturgical leadership and the administration of sacraments.
Moderator of the Curia	A top administrative position held by a Catholic priest in a diocese under the supervision of the bishop.

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

Monsignor	An honorary ecclesiastical title granted to some diocesan priests.
Nun	Member of a religious community of women who have taken solemn vows.
Ordinary	A diocesan bishop or his equivalent, his vicar general and episcopal vicar, or a major superior of a clerical religious order, congregation or society.
Ordination	The rite of the Sacrament of Holy Orders by which the bishop, through the imposition of hands and the prayer of consecration, confers the order of bishop, priest or deacon to exercise a sacred power which comes from Christ on behalf of the Church.
Parish	A specific church community with its own church building and priest; parishioners are the individuals who make up this community.
Pastor	The priest leading a Catholic parish or congregation.
Pope	The Bishop of Rome, and head of the worldwide Catholic Church.
Rectory	The residence given to parish priests by the church, generally close to the church building.
Religious Order Priests	A religious order priest is a member of an organized group of Catholic clergy that is not associated with a particular diocese, and has its own rules and practices; these orders can practice nationally or internationally and may be based anywhere; order priests report directly to a supervisor within their own organization but must be granted permission from a bishop to minister publicly in a particular diocese; order priests frequently serve in diocesan parishes but may also serve in a variety of other posts, such as monasteries or friaries.

REPORT ON DIOCESE INVESTIGATION

Review Board	A local board appointed by the bishop that functions as a confidential consultative body to him. The board is to offer advice to the bishop in his assessment of allegations of sexual abuse of minors and in his determination of a cleric's suitability for ministry.
Sacraments	Seven particularly significant religious rituals in the Catholic Church, including: baptism; eucharist (holy communion); confirmation; reconciliation (confession); anointing of the sick; marriage; and ordination.
Seminary	An educational institution for men preparing to be priests; students are referred to as "seminarians."
Sister	Member of a religious community of women, living under simple vows; title used to address both nuns and religious sisters.
Superior	The leader of a religious order or congregation in the Catholic Church.
"The Guide"	The Guide for Assigning Priests was issued by the National College of Catholic Bishops in 1993, in an attempt to standardize the policies around assigning priests and religious brothers from one diocese or religious order to another and between dioceses and religious orders.
USCCB	"United States Conference of Catholic Bishops;" national membership organization of the Catholic bishops in the United States.
Vatican (or "Rome")	see "Holy See."
Vestment	A garment worn by clergy during services.
Vicar/Vicar General	A priest, auxiliary bishop or coadjutor bishop who assists the diocesan bishop in legal and administrative matters.

