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## **Catholic Church Spent \$10.6M Lobbying in Northeast States, Focused on Thwarting Legislation that Would Aid Clergy Abuse Survivors**

*Church has long fought legislative bills that would extend statutes of limitations, in stark contrast to its public statements about providing abuse survivors healing and closure*

**NEW YORK** – A new report released today finds the Catholic Church spent more than \$10.6 million on lobbying in eight northeast states since 2011, with a focus on defeating legislation that would extend statutes of limitations for survivors of clergy sexual abuse to seek criminal or civil charges against their abusers.

The report, *CHURCH INFLUENCING STATE: How the Catholic Church Spent Millions Against Survivors of Clergy Abuse*, was commissioned by Seeger Weiss LLP, Williams Cedar LLC, Abraham Watkins and the Simpson Tuegel Law Firm and is believed to be the most comprehensive analysis of the Church's campaign to fight statute of limitations legislation. The northeast United States has been the epicenter of the push to extend statutes of limitations for survivors of sex abuse, and the report focuses on the Church's lobbying activities in Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania and Rhode Island.

For example, the report details how in New York, the Church spent nearly \$3 million to thwart efforts to provide justice to New York survivors of clergy sex abuse. Beginning in 2011, the Church's lobbying arm, called the Catholic Conference Policy Group, Inc., had the sole mission of lobbying on "statute of limitations, legislative issues, and liability issues." Despite the Church's war chest and lobbying muscle, New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo in February signed the Child Victims Act into law and New Jersey followed suit with a similar law earlier this month.

The Catholic Church has been more successful in Pennsylvania, where it has spent over \$5 million on lobbying efforts. A grand jury report was released in 2018 that detailed the evidence of more than 300 priests credibly accused of sexually abusing more than 1,000 child victims in the state.

"This report lays out what we have known all along – that the Catholic Church refuses to take responsibility for the decades of abuse that took place knowingly under its watch," said Stephen A. Weiss, founding partner of Seeger Weiss LLP. "All survivors should have access to justice and the opportunity to demand reforms from the Church and any other institution that has allowed such insidious abuse."

“Statute of limitations reforms give survivors more time to obtain some measure of closure on the atrocities committed against them,” said Gerald J. Williams, partner and co-founder of Williams Cedar LLC. “The Church has yet to implement meaningful reforms, and by working to prevent these laws from passing, the Church is clearly demonstrating that it does not stand with survivors.”

As part of this important trend, more than 20 other states across the country are also considering similar legislation which would benefit survivors of sexual abuse. Michelle Simpson Tuegel, a Dallas-based attorney who also serves Of Counsel to Seeger Weiss LLP in New York and New Jersey, has spearheaded advocacy efforts in Texas on a bill that would extend the statute of limitations from 15 to 30 years; it has passed the Senate and House, and awaits the Governor’s signature. Tuegel, along with Houston-based attorney Mo Aziz, represents several Olympic and National Team gymnasts abused by Larry Nassar, and in partnership with Seeger Weiss LLP and Williams Cedar LLC represents more than 300 sex abuse survivors nationwide. “Powerful institutions like the Catholic Church have been relentless in fighting these legislative proposals, and for too long were successful. However, legislators are realizing that these laws are an important tool to hold them accountable and give survivors the voice they deserve,” said Tuegel.

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