



November 10, 2020

**SNAP, the Survivors Network of those
Abused by Priests**
PO Box 56539
Saint Louis MO, 63156

ECA, Ending Clergy Abuse
5017 37TH Avenue SW
Seattle, WA 98126

President-Elect Joseph R. Biden

Dear President Elect Biden,

On March 8th, 2020, Mark Belenchia waited in line for hours outside your campaign event at Tougaloo College in Jackson, Mississippi. Mark is the leader of the state's chapter of the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests (SNAP). SNAP is the oldest and largest organization of clergy abuse survivors in the world, with over 20,000 members. That day Mark asked for your support in ensuring an investigation was opened into the abuse that he and other Mississippians had endured at the hands of Catholic clergy and throughout the United States.

Mark talked to you about your son Beau, who was an extraordinary advocate and champion of survivors in Delaware. As you know he was instrumental in passing the Delaware Child Victims Act, which brought the release of tens of thousands of pages of church predator files showing a history of concealing and transferring known sex offender priests across churches and schools in your home state.

After Mark identified himself to you as a survivor of clergy sexual abuse, he slipped a letter into your hands. "Survivors of clergy abuse," he pleaded, "need you." "Of course," you said, "I know all about SNAP. I am behind your efforts 100 percent. I am totally on board. I totally get it. I am your guy." You promised to get back to Mark about his letter. And you were emphatic: "give me a call."

This is that call.

Just over eight months after your solemn promise to Mark and to us, Americans have selected you as the next President of the United States, only the second Roman Catholic in American history to hold the highest office in our country. Though the coronavirus pandemic and last few months seem to have upended many norms Americans had taken for granted, one thing has not changed: survivors have learned not to expect justice. You and your administration can join with us to set a new course, bring justice to survivors, and finally heal our church. We have a mandate as victims of rape and sexual assault in the Catholic Church to you - our Catholic President.

There are three things we are asking you to do right now:



First, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) will be meeting next week to once again address the issue of clergy sex abuse and the cover-up crisis. They will convene just days after the long-delayed release of the former Cardinal McCarrick report today - which will detail a shocking history of crimes against children and minors, and decades of cover-up between U.S. bishops, dioceses, and the Vatican. We urge every Catholic, most especially you, to read the report and address it as a national concern - not just for Catholic institutions, but for all institutions that serve the nation's children. You have an opportunity to demonstrate your commitment to survivors by addressing the bishops next week and making clear your intentions to support survivors, Catholics, transparency, and accountability. At a minimum, you can demand that all bishops release the still-concealed names of known clergy who abused our children and the files that document these abuses.

Second, you must directly involve survivors during this transition time in the selection process for the next Ambassador to the Holy See. There has been a long-standing policy and practice by which U.S. bishops have routinely used Vatican state sovereignty to conceal crimes against children in our country and circumvent U.S. criminal justice. Your administration must put an immediate end to this practice. This can only happen if the next ambassador is prepared to represent tens of thousands of U.S. survivors who are citizens of our country and stand up to those who seek to silence them. You can boldly take the lead in addressing this issue internationally, including working with the United Nations and human rights organizations in supporting a global effort for legal protections for victims around the world.

Thirdly, victims have long been calling for a nationwide investigation into clergy sex crimes and their institutional cover-up. A Biden justice department should immediately appoint a task force to investigate these crimes and prosecute those responsible. Faith-based organizations of all denominations were recipients of billions in federal taxpayer relief funds this year. Taxpayers deserve accountability.

Indeed, this spring, the Catholic Church received at least \$1.4 billion (possibly as much as \$3.5 billion) in taxpayer relief funds with tens of millions of dollars going to dioceses that have sought bankruptcy protection because their senior managers knowingly covered up child sex crimes. The U.S. bishops must answer to the taxpayers *and to you* regarding their involvement with clergy abuse crimes.

The Vatican report released today will not tell a new story. It will sit atop a mountain of over a million pages of criminal evidence in court-ordered released documents from civil and criminal cases and grand jury investigations from every diocese around the country. Over 20 states' attorneys general are currently investigating abuse in the U.S. church. That mountain during your first year as President will grow even higher.

Even though controlled, edited, and censored by its Vatican authors, today's report and all the subsequent ones will shake again the faith you were raised in. It is the same faith that was taken from us when we were betrayed as children. How different would your life and faith be --



something you frequently testify to as your source of strength and comfort -- if you had been the victim of sexual assault by a priest as a child, and later discovered your bishop had covered up these crimes or knowingly transferred that priest into your parish and school?

The Catholic faith is the moral foundation of your personhood. It is a faith that you have never abandoned in your long history of public service. It is no surprise to us, who were raised Catholic just like you, that in your acceptance speech you quoted scripture. Or that you shared with the nation your favorite hymn, On Eagle's Wings, so well-known to all Catholic churchgoers.

Victims of clergy abuse, along with the U.S. Church, are ready to move forward. But we cannot do so without your help, the help you promised Mark and thousands of us that March day.

Sincerely,

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