



Thoughts on the Protection of Children

Archbishop Charles J. Chaput, O.F.M. Cap.
April 5, 2017

Dear friends,

Each April, our local Church participates in the national observance of Child Abuse Prevention and Awareness Month. Catholics across the Archdiocese share an ongoing commitment to create parish and school environments that are safe and that protect our young people from harm.

Through our Office for Children and Youth Protection (OCYP), the Archdiocese will once again engage in various activities and events on behalf of our young people. In preparation, OCYP has already provided parish Safe Environment Coordinators with information about resources, initiatives, and activities that demonstrate our constant efforts on behalf of young people and their safety.

I want to call particular attention to Blue Monday, on Monday, April 24, and Blue Sunday, on Sunday, April 30. Blue Sunday is a national day of prayer for abused children and those who care for them. Please be sure to keep this vital issue and all victims of sexual abuse in your prayers on that day. On Blue Monday, Catholics may wish to join the wider community in wearing blue to demonstrate the importance of families and communities working together to prevent child abuse and raise awareness about abuse prevention and education efforts.

In addition to strict safe environment practices, the Catholic community supports sexual abuse survivors and their families with healing and recovery. We realize and understand that every survivor's journey toward healing is a very personal journey. The first step is to report any incident of abuse or suspected abuse to law enforcement. The second is to seek help. To assist, the Archdiocese has professionals available to listen and has dedicated resources to cover the costs of a survivor's chosen path in counseling, addiction treatment and other services. I encourage you to learn more about these services and resources for survivors on the [Office for Child and Youth Protection](#) website.

Regrettably, April is also a time when damaging efforts to secure retroactive statute of limitations (SOL) legislation tend to increase – legislation that prejudicially targets religious and private institutions. Legislation to change the statute of limitations was intensely debated and passed by the state House of Representatives last year. The retroactive measure in that bill was stripped out by the state Senate after it was determined to be unconstitutional. The revised and improved Senate bill

passed that chamber unanimously. This piece of legislation was one that the Catholic community could support. But the House failed to reconsider it, and it was left inactive at the end of the legislative session. Sadly, a good piece of lawmaking was allowed to fail.

The General Assembly is now in a new legislative season, and several new SOL bills have been introduced and are already moving. One bill mirrors the positive, *prospective* child protection measure passed by the Senate last year. This bill has already cleared the Senate and is currently in the House for consideration. Another bill that includes the retroactive SOL has also been introduced in the House. I will continue to keep you informed on these developments.

Like all other institutions that care for children, our local Church has learned hard lessons about child sexual abuse. We've also made great progress in protecting our children, families and wider Church community. Our shared commitment to prevent abuse from taking place within our Church is a permanent one. We should never shrink from those responsibilities or from an opportunity to help others understand our efforts. That commitment isn't just lip service either. Since 2002, the Archdiocese has invested nearly \$19 million in providing support for survivors and their families as well as training programs and background checks to prevent abuse from happening in the first place—and none of those funds have anything to do with civil litigation.

I'm deeply grateful for the part all our people play in our efforts to protect our young people. If you have any questions about this vital work, please contact Leslie Davila, Director of the Office for Child and Youth Protection at 215-965-1743 or ldavila@archphila.org.

May God bless you during these last days of Lent and throughout the Easter season.

Sincerely yours in Jesus Christ,

*+Charles J. Chaput, O.F.M. Cap
Archbishop of Philadelphia*