APPENDIX 4
Abuse victims help send bill for Senate vote

After harrowing testimony, plan to extend time for civil suits clears panel

By BETH MILLER
The News Journal

DOVER — Robert Quill drove two days from Marathon, Fla., to tell his horror story to a state Senate committee and urge lawmakers to change Delaware's civil statute of limitations for child sexual abuse.

Quill said he was a victim of the Rev. Francis G. DeLuca - the retired Delaware priest arrested in the fall in Syracuse, N.Y., and charged with sexually abusing a teen there.

"If I constructed a complete and accurate narrative of my adolescence, recounting in detail each of the hundreds of episodes of DeLuca's criminal sexual abuse of a child, few could listen to the entire story without being physically sickened," Quill said.

Kristine Geisler, 17, of Newark, wept as she recounted how someone in her neighborhood abused her from the time she was 6 until she was 9 years old. Jack Keating wore a photograph of himself as a little boy, around the age that his sexual abuse started. And Ed Burke told lawmakers he can remember every detail of the abuse he suffered as a boy 61 years ago.

"More such stories unfolded in a standing-room-only crowd of about 100 people Wednesday. At the end, lawmakers released Senate Bill 189 from the Health and Social Services Committee. It is scheduled to reach the Senate floor April 4.

The bill, sponsored by Sen. Karen E. Petersen, D-Stanton, would eliminate the civil statute of limitations for child sexual abuse. The law now requires suits to be filed within two years.

"How do you expect a 6-year-old to do that within two years?" asked Geisler's mother, Darlene Geisler Tulloch, whose daughter's abuser recently was convicted of multiple counts of rape against the teen and another girl.

"Time doesn't erase the crime," Kristine Geisler said. "And what scares me most is that I am a normal kid. All of my friends have a story like mine. It took me six years to find my strength. It might take them even longer."

The bill allows a two-year period during which claims that have been barred by the statute of limitations can be brought.

Robert M. Quill describes Wednesday the years of abuse he suffered as a child to a General Assembly panel.

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Cash-strapped NCCo asks Wilmington
Bill: Nonprofit groups fear effect of eliminating all time limits

Delaware's two-year time limit could be brought forward.

It also allows suits against private and public institutions if gross negligence can be shown as a factor in the abuse, but Peterson said there is disagreement about whether it would allow suits against public schools and state institutions. Schools and state institutions are intended to be among those included, she said.

Diocese of Wilmington attorney Anthony Flynn supports the bill, which he said is "about holding child sexual abusers accountable."

Lt. Gov. John C. Carney Jr. supports the bill, which he said is "about holding child sexual abusers accountable".

Attorney Mark Rarrow, who represents several Catholic churches, schools and nonprofit groups, said the bill has the potential for "unfairly punishing innocent organizations." It would make more sense, he said, to allow retroactive suits against the abuser only.

Flynn said the law should be changed to recognize that victims of child sexual abuse are "uniquely damaged" and often require many years to come to terms with the abuse. But, he said, some time limit should be attached to the bill to protect the right to a fair trial and also to encourage "victims to get help sooner than later."

In legislation debated last year, the diocese accepted a 25-year time limit, starting after the victim reached 18 or hit his 40th birthday.


"For me, the bill is pretty simple," Carney said. "It's about holding child sexual abusers accountable. It's about giving victims their day in court. It's about protecting others from abuse in the future."

Quill, an attorney who was diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder and has been on disability since 2002, said victims live constantly with the haunting consequences of the abuse they suffer.

"Del Vecchio" haunted my entire adolescence," he said. "Throughout those turbulent and painful years, he invaded and violated the private moments, events and functions of my life and invaded and violated my mind and soul."

Del Vecchio's arrest in October prompted Bishop Michael A. Salfelli in November to release the names of 20 priests against whom the diocese had corroborated allegations of child sexual abuse. The Capuchin friars later confirmed similar allegations against one of their priests.

Three lawsuits are pending in Delaware courts against three priests, one of whom died in 1996.

Newark counsel James Walsh reminded lawmakers that child sexual abuse is more likely to occur in families than anywhere else.

"This is not a clergy problem," Walsh said. "This is a societal problem."

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