



Pre-hearing Statement About the Attorney General Subpoena

Seattle, July 11, 2024 - The Archdiocese of Seattle takes the issue of sexual abuse of minors very seriously. It condemns such conduct, works with law enforcement and has been a leader in addressing and redressing sexual abuse in the Catholic Church, including abuse that happened many decades ago. Those efforts have been successful: sexual abuse of a minor by clergy is very rare now – the last known incidence in the Archdiocese of Seattle occurred in 2007.

In fact, months ago the Archdiocese offered to cooperate in providing relevant documents to the attorney general and instead, the attorney general rebuffed the offer and staged a press conference to announce a subpoena.

While the Archdiocese of Seattle remains ready to work cooperatively with the attorney general, we object to this specific subpoena because it is unnecessary, unlawful, and excessive.

- It is unnecessary because the Archdiocese is willing to provide relevant and appropriate documents. The Archdiocese has instituted reforms that have been effective in preventing abuse, and because our civil and criminal court system can – and does – already redress the past wrongs, attempting to do so again in this manner is unnecessary.
- It is unlawful because the state’s Charitable Trust Act (CTA) has a clear religious exemption. The Washington Attorney General has no authority under the CTA to investigate religious organizations and, unlike other states, has not been granted this kind of investigative authority. Furthermore, the state should not become enmeshed with the conduct of religious institutions, which violates the principle of separation of church and state.
- And it is excessive because of the vast swath of materials requested. To provide just one example, the Attorney General seeks *every receipt* from January 1, 1940, to the present – in an Archdiocese with more than 170 pastoral locations and 72 schools serving more than 600,000 Catholics. Taxpayers, the public interest, and Catholics are not served by such overreach.

The Archdiocese of Seattle remains ready to work with the Attorney General to identify relevant documents and ensure the necessary privacy of those harmed by abuse so that a lawful and reasonable investigation can take place.

As part of its commitment to transparency, the Archdiocese of Seattle invites people to visit its [Protect and Heal website](#) to learn about the history of sexual abuse in the archdiocese, which peaked in 1975 and has since sharply declined. The website also outlines the focus on helping abuse survivors and their families find healing, and how since the early 1980s the archdiocese has taken steps to prevent abuse and protect the community.

Today the archdiocese enforces its [Safe Environment Program](#) with policies and procedures designed to prevent and recognize signs of sexual abuse of minors. To report any suspicion of abuse by any Catholic Church personnel, please contact local law enforcement. In addition, anyone who has knowledge of misconduct by a member of the clergy, an employee or a volunteer of the Archdiocese of Seattle is urged to call the archdiocesan hotline at 1-800-446-7762.

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