

BRAMHALL'S WORLD



Speed aid to abuse survivors

I know that Gov. Cuomo is eager for the New York State Legislature to pass a Child Victims Act. So am I. Here's why:

I believe it is important to strengthen the Child Victims Act to ensure that all victim-survivors are the center of this much-needed legislation. The emphasis must be on helping them heal, not breaking government, educational, health, welfare, or religious organizations and institutions.

Over the last decade, the New York State Catholic Conference, which represents the bishops of New York, has worked with both Democrats and Republicans to eliminate the criminal statute of limitations completely — essential protection that goes beyond current versions of the legislation.

It has also advocated raising dramatically the age at which victims can come forward to bring civil suits and requiring background checks and youth-protection training for all who work with minors (something we in the Catholic Church already do).

Right now, we, along with many others, want to work with Cuomo, Attorney General-elect Letitia James, legislative

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BY TIMOTHY CARDINAL DOLAN

leaders and all interested parties to achieve a balanced, fair reform that provides a sense of resolution to all victims, no matter who their abuser was — a government worker, a public school teacher, a counselor, a health care professional, a coach, a foster parent, and, yes, a member of the clergy, no matter how long ago.

As always, I speak only as a pastor, and leave it to our elected officials to determine the specifics of legislation, but I suggest essential principles that should guide this reform.

Our Catholic people want such reform, and so do their bishops. In fact, all eight Catholic dioceses in New York State have already instituted programs offering resolution and compensation to victims of sexual abuse as minors, no matter when it occurred. The Archdiocese of New York and four other state dioceses have instituted the Independent Reconciliation and Compensation Program, with over \$200 million in compensation paid to more than 1,000 indi-

viduals, with some cases reaching back over 60 years.

The compensation program, which we inaugurated in 2016, works well. It can be a model for swift, certain compensation throughout New York State. Recently, Kenneth Feinberg, the renowned mediator who administers our program, outlined why this survivor-centered approach works. In short: it surpasses endless and costly litigation — which can further hurt the victim-survivors; it insures fair and reasonable compensation; and prevents the real possibility — as has happened elsewhere — of bankrupting both public and private organizations, including churches, that provide essential services in education, charity and health care.

I have met and prayed with too many victims abused by members of too many organizations. They tell me that, while complete healing from the trauma is a long (often impossible) process, providing compensation may help considerably, particularly as a tangible acknowledgement of the harm done to them. We

have also done our best as well to make sure that spiritual, emotional and therapeutic support is provided for those who would like it.

Yes, reservations have been expressed the reliability of claims involving long-past events based on fading memories, and the fact that some organizations would be exempted. However, our Church's own experience in abandoning the rigid statute of limitations, although financially expensive, was morally necessary in order to help promote healing and justice for those who deserve it. We know that we can work together now to pass a bill that promotes justice for every victim-survivor in New York State and every organization seeking

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to make amends.

Right before Christmas, I visited a state correctional facility. One of the inmates whispered to me, "Father, my family approached your outreach program, and they have some peace because of it."

Hopefully, sometime this New Year, more victim-survivors will be able to say the same.

Dolan is archbishop of New York.