

R.I. judge rules against right to confidentiality

By Jerry Filteau
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — As U.S. bishops worked to implement the new child protection charter, a Rhode Island judge cited it in an order to the Providence Diocese to turn over records relating to alleged child abuse by its priests.

Late June and early July saw more sex abuse lawsuits filed against the church, grand jury inquiries into church actions and additional priests removed from their posts. An abuse hot line in one archdiocese fielded at least 60 calls in its first month. One new lawsuit accused Bishop G. Patrick Ziemann, who resigned in disgrace in 1999, of a 19-year sexual relationship with a man starting

when the plaintiff was in the sixth grade.

Rhode Island Superior Court Judge Robert Krause, rejecting the Providence Diocese's claim of confidentiality of privileged communications, told the diocese July 1 to turn over documentation it has of complaints against alleged abusers, its investigations into those complaints and medical records of alleged abusers sent for treatment.

The diocesan documentation was sought by attorneys for more than 30 plaintiffs who claim to have been abused as children by a Rhode Island priest or nun. Twelve priests, four of them dead, and one nun are named as abusers.

Besides denying the diocese's claim to confidentiality under state laws, Krause

cited the "commitment to transparency and openness" that the U.S. bishops pledged in their "Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People," adopted June 14 at their national meeting in Dallas.

In New Hampshire, representatives of the Manchester Diocese and attorneys representing more than 100 alleged victims said July 1 that they were negotiating to reach a mediated settlement of all the cases without taking them to court. Less than two weeks earlier the Boston Archdiocese and attorneys for 175 alleged victims there embarked on a similar course.

The New Orleans Archdiocese reported July 2 that the child sexual abuse hot line it established June 3 took 60 to

70 calls in its first month, including 20 allegations against church personnel that the archdiocese was pursuing with follow-up interviews or investigations. A spokesman said at least seven allegations were against priests who are no longer in active ministry. Some callers said they had been abused but did not want any follow-up, and some people just called to praise or criticize the church's handling of the issue.

The Diocese of Albany, N.Y., permanently removed six priests June 28 and released their names. Among them was recently retired Father John P. Bertolucci, who in the 1980s was a prominent leader in the Catholic charismatic movement and had a nationally syndicated television program.



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Four-year-old Rebekah Phelps waits in the exam room at the Mercy Outreach Center June 27.

No wealth and a child's health

EDITOR'S NOTE: This article is the third in an occasional series of articles on children in poverty.

A parent's empty wallet can mean a lifetime of health problems for his or her children, according to a number of health and poverty experts.

A baby born to a poor mother is more likely to die before its first birthday than is a baby born to a mother who smoked during pregnancy, according to Barbara Stephenson, communications director for the Catholic Campaign for Human Development, the U.S. bishops' anti-poverty office.

This year, CCHD is focusing on children in poverty in the second year of its three-year campaign to highlight U.S. poverty. Information on the campaign can be found on the Web at www.povertyusa.org.

Stephenson cited a number of statistics provided by various government and private agencies. They paint a bleak health picture for poor children, who face obstacles to good health that children from wealthier homes generally do not.

One of CCHD's sources is the federal government's National Center for Health Statistics, which published a 1998 report that examined the effect of a family's income and education levels on a child's health. The report found that poor children risk the following dangers:

- Infants born to mothers who did not finish high school were about 50 percent more likely to be of low birthweight than infants whose mothers finished college.

- Children from ages 1 to 5 living in low-income families are seven times as likely to have elevated levels of lead in their blood as children in high-income families.

- Poor children are less likely to see a physician regularly than are children from families with middle-class or high incomes. However, if their parents have enrolled them in some sort of insurance plan, they are far more likely to have a regular physician. For example, 21 percent of uninsured poor children have no regular source of health care, as opposed to 4 percent of poor children who

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