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## **NEWS FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **AG Kaul Releases Update in Advance of One-Year Anniversary of Clergy and Faith Leader Abuse Initiative**

*Over 200 completed reports of over 150 abusers, 51 reporting for the first time*

MADISON, Wis. – As Wisconsin approaches the one-year anniversary of the launch of Wisconsin’s Clergy and Faith Leader Abuse Initiative, AG Kaul is releasing additional information and highlighting the successes.

“In the year since we launched the Clergy and Faith Leader Abuse Initiative, over 200 people have reported information, and a District Attorney has criminally charged a defendant in a previously unreported case,” said AG Kaul. “We continue to encourage anyone with information about clergy and faith leader abuse to report that information.”

### **Wisconsin DOJ Takes Every Report Seriously**

Shortly after launching the initiative, DOJ organized training for victim advocates in Wisconsin so that they would be prepared to support survivors of sexual abuse by clergy and faith leaders. The training offered live presentations by national experts on working with survivors of clergy sexual abuse. Victim advocates at DOJ and throughout Wisconsin are prepared to respond.

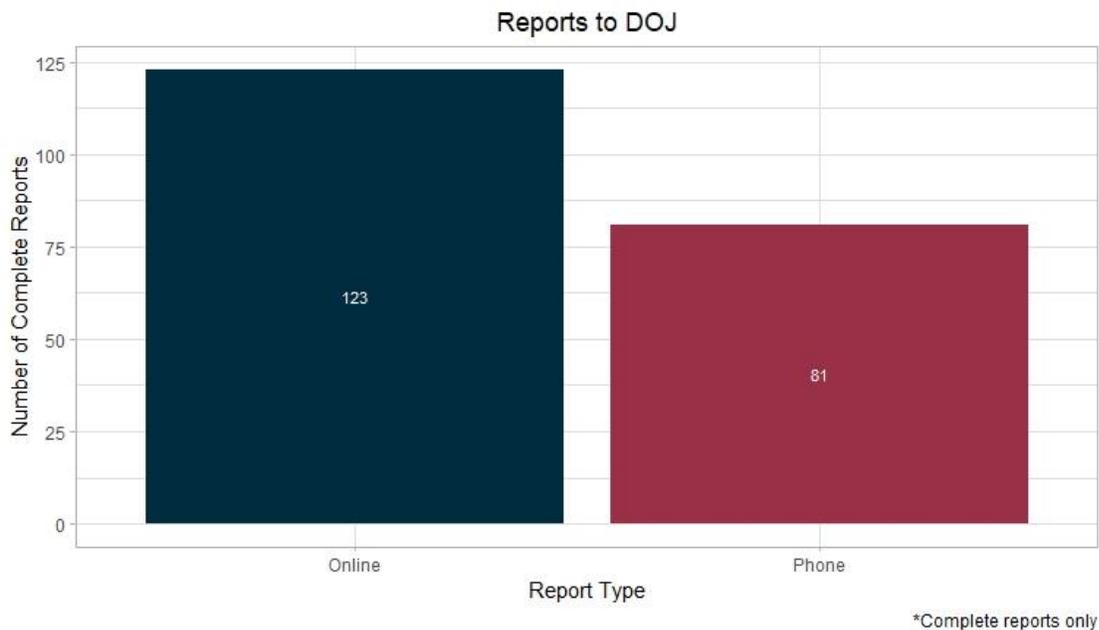
After DOJ receives a report of abuse, a DOJ victim specialist evaluates the report to determine what follow up is appropriate. If the reporting party has indicated a willingness for DOJ to contact them, a victim specialist at DOJ will reach out to help with identifying survivor support resources. The report is then evaluated by a multi-disciplinary team (MDT) comprised of a victim advocate, an investigator, and a

prosecutor. The MDT confers and recommends next steps, which can include follow up questions for the survivor, gathering of additional documents, or referral to local law enforcement for further investigation. MDTs continue to meet on a regular basis to evaluate the reports made to DOJ. Each and every report of abuse made to DOJ has been or will be reviewed by an MDT.

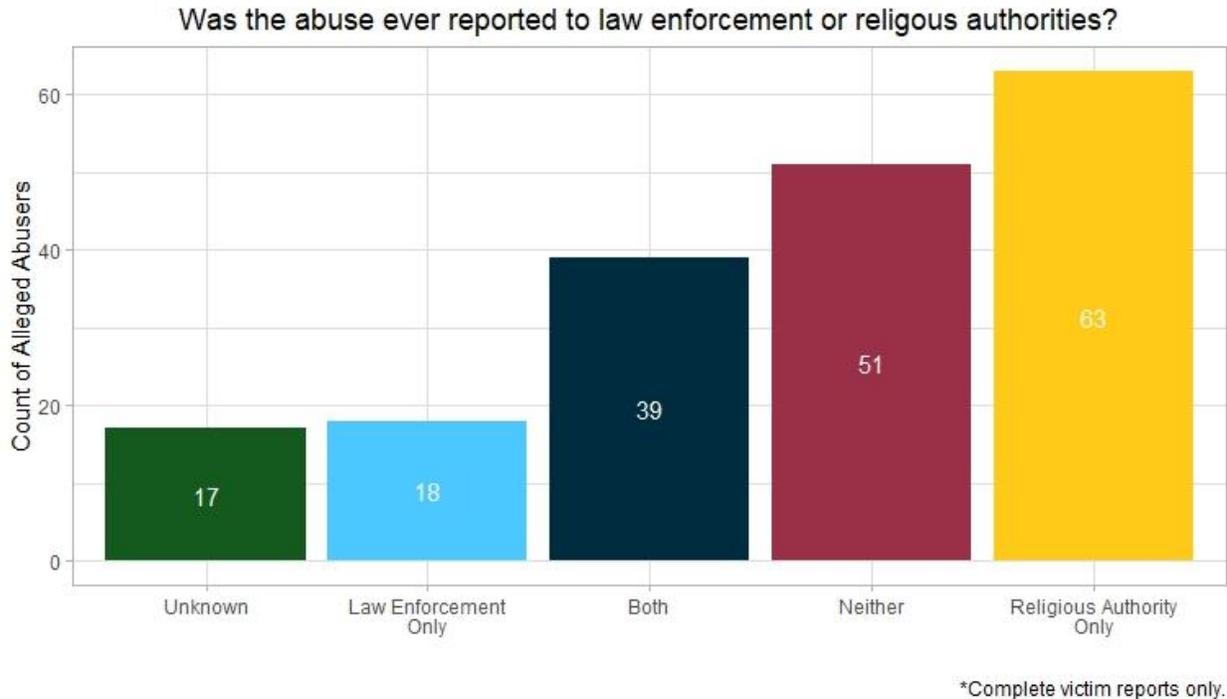
One reporting individual stated, “For the first time ever - someone listened, someone cared, and most importantly someone shared the same level of care and compassion for not only my kids, but also for the betterment and safety of all children. For the first time my daughter had an advocate wanting to help at the highest level - so that wrongdoers could be held accountable, and justice was a possibility - not just a hopeful wish.”

### **Wisconsin DOJ is Making Progress**

As of April 18, the Wisconsin Department of Justice Clergy and Faith Leader Initiative has received a total of **204 completed reports** to the toll-free tip line and the online reporting tool **accusing more than 150 individuals of abuse**. Over 1,000 calls have been made to or from the tip line, including repeat calls from survivors who remember additional information or are looking for follow up information.



Additionally, DOJ has received a significant number of reports from those who had not previously reported to anyone.



For example, last year, a survivor used the DOJ online reporting tool ([www.supportsurvivors.widobj.gov](http://www.supportsurvivors.widobj.gov)) to report abuse by a faith leader that had occurred at a church camp. Prior to reporting to DOJ, the survivor had never previously reported the abuse to law enforcement. Following the report to DOJ, a victim specialist at DOJ reached out to the survivor to talk with him about the possible paths forward, including whether he was willing to proceed with further investigation by law enforcement. In addition, an MDT at DOJ convened to evaluate the report, ultimately deciding that it should be referred to local law enforcement, if the survivor agreed. Following a discussion with the survivor, DOJ reached out to the local district attorney and sheriff's office about the case, informing them about the details and encouraging further investigation. Following an investigation, the district attorney charged the case in early February (*State of Wisconsin v. Remington Jon Nystrom*, Waushara County Case No. 2022 CF 27).

## **Survivors are Still Encouraged to Report**

Although many survivors have already come forward, DOJ encourages survivors of sexual abuse by clergy and faith leaders to contact DOJ, either through the online reporting tool, [www.supportsurvivors.widoj.gov](http://www.supportsurvivors.widoj.gov), or by calling the toll-free tip line at 1-877-222-2620.

Survivors reporting to DOJ will be in control of what happens following their report. As one survivor stated: “The victim specialist at DOJ was extremely supportive and listened to me. I encourage anyone who has survived sexual abuse in their church to contact DOJ.”

## **In Summary**

The Wisconsin Department of Justice Clergy and Faith Leader Abuse Initiative is making progress for survivors of abuse at the hands of a trusted leader in their faith community. Providing survivors ample time to make the decision to report if they so choose is critical and one of the reasons this initiative remains ongoing. Investigation and prosecution of any crime takes time, and sexual assault investigations can be incredibly traumatic and complex, requiring additional time for survivors.

The initiative has already resulted in one prosecution of an accused child assailant and has given countless Wisconsinites and their families resources in dealing with traumatic experiences that resulted when someone in a position of trust abused their power. Wisconsin Department of Justice will continue to work with victims and their loved ones to get justice where possible and provide support to all impacted.