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**NEWS FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

April 25, 2024

**AG Kaul Releases Update at Three-Year Anniversary of  
Clergy and Faith Leader Abuse Initiative**

MADISON, Wis. – As Wisconsin approaches the three-year anniversary of the launch of the Wisconsin Department of Justice’s (DOJ) Clergy and Faith Leader Abuse Initiative, Attorney General Josh Kaul is releasing additional information, including statements from survivors who have reached out to DOJ, and highlights of other progress being made through the initiative.

“Through this initiative, Wisconsin DOJ continues to work to support survivors and independently review clergy and faith leader abuse in Wisconsin,” said Attorney General Kaul. “If you have information about clergy and faith leader abuse, I encourage you to submit a report through the initiative’s online reporting tool or to call the toll-free tip line.”

One survivor stated: “I am deeply grateful for the work of the Wisconsin DOJ in the Clergy and Faith Leader Abuse Initiative. When I first decided to come forward and tell the truth of my decades old abuse, I was terrified ... The victim services specialist was my first contact with the DOJ and the process was one of great support and compassion. ... My hope is that victims who have remained silent with their abuse stories will go the DOJ first and begin their journey towards healing.”

**Wisconsin DOJ Takes Every Report Seriously**

Shortly after launching the initiative, Wisconsin DOJ organized training for victim advocates in Wisconsin so that they would be prepared to support survivors of sexual

Page 1 of 6

abuse by clergy and faith leaders. The training offered live presentations by national experts on how to work with survivors of clergy sexual abuse. Victim advocates at Wisconsin DOJ and throughout Wisconsin are prepared to respond.

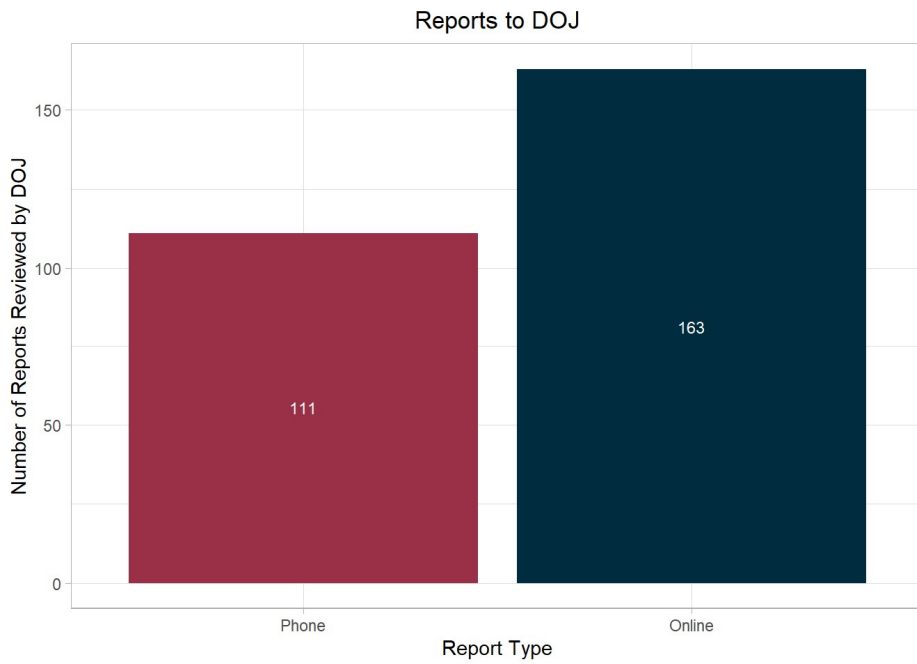
After Wisconsin DOJ receives a report of abuse, a victim specialist evaluates the report to determine what follow up is appropriate. If the reporting party has indicated a willingness for Wisconsin DOJ to contact them, a victim specialist will reach out to help with identifying survivor support resources. 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. Every report of abuse made to Wisconsin DOJ has been, or will be, reviewed by an MDT.

Throughout this initiative, a Wisconsin DOJ victim specialist continues to work full-time answering questions from survivors and following up with them when appropriate. Speaking on their reporting experience, one survivor stated: “I can say that I truly don't think I could have gone through with [being interviewed about the abuse] without [the] advocacy and support” of the DOJ victim specialist. The survivor described the experience as “a safe and comfortable interview.” The survivor also credited the DOJ victim specialist, describing the specialist’s “care and follow up” as “phenomenal.”

### **The Reports Received by Wisconsin DOJ Are Making a Difference**

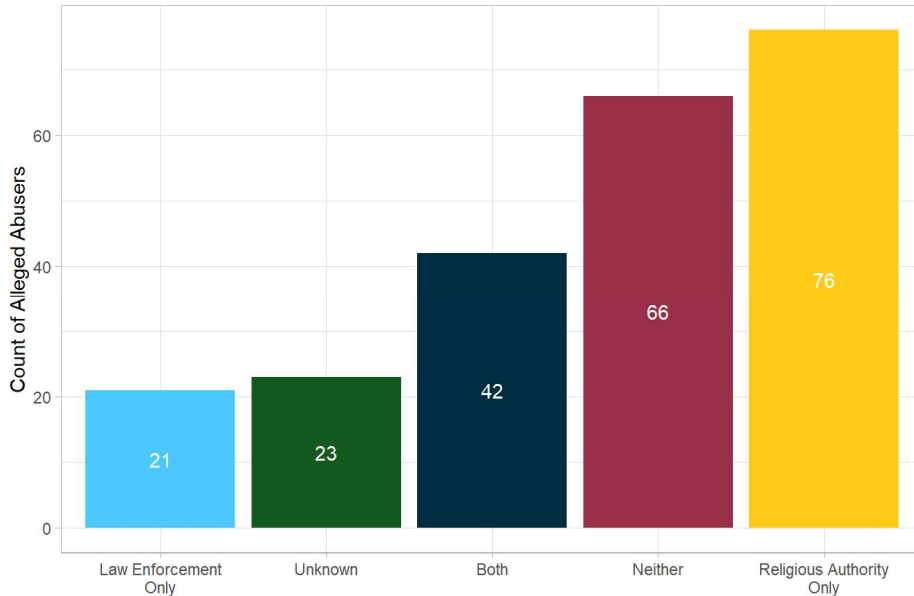
As of April 24, 2024, the Wisconsin DOJ Clergy and Faith Leader Initiative has received a total of 274 completed reports to the toll-free tip line at 1-877-222-2620 and the [online reporting tool](#).

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

Did the victim ever report the abuser to law enforcement or religious authorities?



For example, a survivor used the Wisconsin DOJ online reporting tool ([www.supportsurvivors.widj.gov](http://www.supportsurvivors.widj.gov)) to report abuse by faith leader [Remington Nystrom](#) that had occurred at a central Wisconsin church camp. Prior to reporting to Wisconsin DOJ, the survivor had never previously reported the abuse to law enforcement. Following the report, a Wisconsin DOJ victim specialist reached out to the survivor to discuss the possible paths forward, including whether he was willing to proceed with further investigation by law enforcement. In addition, an MDT at Wisconsin 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, Wisconsin DOJ reached out to the local district attorney and sheriff's office, informing them about the details of this case and encouraging further investigation. Following an investigation, in February 2022, the Waushara County District Attorney filed charges in the case (*State of Wisconsin v. Remington Jon Nystrom*, Waushara County Case No. 2022 CF 27). Prior to trial, on April 13, 2023, Nystrom pled no contest to, and was convicted of, second-degree sexual assault of a child. On July 18, 2023, the court sentenced Nystrom to seven years of initial confinement in prison followed by 10 years of extended supervision.

- Commented [MC2]: Is there a more layman way to say charged the case? Filed charges in the case?
- Commented [EW3R2]: done
- Commented [MC4]: I need to do a little research to see if AP style capitalizes charge, unless either of you know? I believe the answer is no, but I am not certain.
- Commented [EW5R4]: The Crim Lit people capitalize and that's how we did it in this release last year but my preference actually is not to capitalize.

Another case reported through the Wisconsin DOJ [online reporting tool](#) also resulted in criminal charges. The survivor reported alleged abuse by [Theodore McCarrick](#), a former cardinal of the Catholic Church. Following the report, an MDT at Wisconsin DOJ convened and decided to refer the report to local law enforcement with consent from the survivor.

With assistance from the DOJ Division of Criminal Investigation, local law enforcement interviewed the survivor and subsequently referred the matter to the local district attorney. On April 14, 2023, the Walworth County District Attorney charged McCarrick with one count of fourth-degree sexual assault for an incident that is alleged to have occurred in April of 1977. (*State of Wisconsin v. Theodore McCarrick*, Walworth County Case No. 2023 CM 160). The complaint alleges that McCarrick engaged in repeated sexual abuse of the victim over time, including the charged incident that involved the alleged fondling of the victim's genitals while staying as a guest at a Lake Geneva residence. On January 10, 2024, the court determined that McCarrick was not competent to stand trial and suspended the proceedings. The court has scheduled a hearing for December 27, 2024, to review the status of the case.

As another example, three survivors used the Wisconsin DOJ online reporting tool to report alleged abuse in the early 1970s by John Cullinan, a deceased Catholic priest who served in the La Crosse diocese. Prior to contacting Wisconsin DOJ in response to its initiative, none of these survivors had ever previously reported the alleged abuse to law enforcement. Following the reports to Wisconsin DOJ, an MDT at Wisconsin DOJ convened to evaluate the separate reports, ultimately deciding that information about the abuse alleged by the survivors should be sent to the La Crosse diocese, if the survivors agreed, so that the diocese could consider adding the priest's name to the church's list of clergy with substantiated allegations of child sexual abuse.

A victim specialist at Wisconsin DOJ spoke with the survivors about their willingness to share information about their alleged abuse with the church. The survivors agreed to share the information, with the support of a Wisconsin DOJ victim specialist. Once the diocese received this information, it conducted its own review, which included consensual interviews with the survivors. Following this review, on December 20, 2022, the church added Cullinan's name to its [credibly accused list](#).

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

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Commented [EW7R6]: Same as above

Commented [EW8]: I would not abbreviate to be consistent with other dates elsewhere in the release and that is my preference but defer to Comms on this

Although many survivors have already come forward, Wisconsin DOJ encourages survivors of sexual abuse by clergy and faith leaders to contact Wisconsin 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.

### **Wisconsin DOJ to Issue Final Report**

After following up as appropriate with each and every report made to Wisconsin DOJ as part of the initiative, the department will issue a final report. The report will provide an overview of the initiative, a summary of the reports made to Wisconsin DOJ and what has been done in response to those reports. The report also will discuss institutional responses to allegations of sexual abuse, including responses to the Wisconsin DOJ initiative.

Because the timeline for appropriate follow up for each report to Wisconsin DOJ is uncertain and depends on various factors, the release date for a final report has not yet been determined.

### **In Summary**

The Wisconsin DOJ Clergy and Faith Leader Abuse Initiative is making progress for survivors of abuse at the hands of a trusted leader in their faith community. The initiative has resulted in criminal charges against two alleged abusers. One of these resulted in a conviction of an accused child assailant and the addition of a priest's name to a diocesan list of individuals with substantiated allegations of child sexual abuse. In addition, the initiative has helped connect many survivors with victim services. Wisconsin DOJ will continue to work with survivors and their loved ones to follow up on information reported to Wisconsin DOJ and to provide support to those who have been impacted by clergy and faith leader abuse.