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Date: February 10, 2020

To: Kansas House Judiciary Committee
From: Chuck Weber, Kansas Catholic Conference

Kansas Catholic Conference neutral testimony on HB 2306

Chairman Patton and members of the committee.

Sexual abuse is an act of the most intimate betrayal imaginable. It is nothing short of contemptible and horrific. For those violated at the hands of a religious leader, the pain is compounded immeasurably because it keeps the victim from a place of inner healing—God and His Church. These despicable acts, sometimes committed by Catholic priests and bishops, and at times even covered up, are completely contrary to the teachings of the Catholic Church.

As a practicing Catholic, I hang my head in shame at the clergy abuse scandal, which some members of my own Church have been complicit. We cannot say “I am sorry” enough.

As the Executive Director of the Kansas Catholic Conference and on behalf of the four Kansas Catholic Bishops, I would like to offer each of you, and particularly the victims and family members--those known and those perhaps still suffering in silence--the personal and deeply authentic apology of our four Kansas Catholic Bishops. On their behalf, I convey their sincere prayers for your comfort, peace and healing.

Over the past two decades in particular, Catholics have set our sights on renewing our Church. What does that look like? There is an addendum to my testimony detailing many of the measures that we have instituted here in Kansas. Please take time to review it. In short, we believe we have created the gold standard of safe environments for our children and other vulnerable people.

But prevention is not the primary question before us today. This bill appears to be about how to redress victim-survivors when safeguards failed them. Because of the brave survivors who have been willing to come forward, we have more than 20 years of experience in addressing the pain of abuse and protecting our children and vulnerable adults. From this experience, one thing is clear to us—nothing short of a survivor-centric approach is acceptable.

MOST REVEREND JOHN B. BRUNGARDT, D.D.
DIOCESE OF DODGE CITY

MOST REVEREND JOSEPH F. NAUMANN, D.D.
Board Chairman
ARCHDIOCESE OF KANSAS CITY IN KANSAS

MOST REVEREND CARL A. KEMME, D.D.
DIOCESE OF WICHITA

MOST REVEREND GERALD L. VINCKE, S.T.L.
DIOCESE OF SALINA

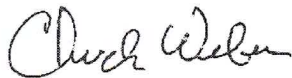
CHUCK WEBER
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

We know that it sometimes takes decades for a survivor of childhood sexual abuse to come forward. That is why there is no limitation on when the Catholic Church in Kansas is willing to offer services and support to a survivor, nor any limits as to what we will do to investigate allegations and determine if someone is a current threat to children or vulnerable adults.

As we consider this specific legislative proposal, we respectfully ask the question, is it a survivor-centric approach? Does it emphasize healing for the survivors, regardless of when the abuse occurred, or who the abuser was: whether it was a priest, coach, a teacher, a doctor or even a family member? If the civil statute of limitations is lifted or eliminated, it must be focused first and foremost on all survivors. We respectfully ask that any changes embrace the principles of fairness, justice and due process.

We are searching and struggling for that answer—not in just this legislation—but through all legislation or programs or protocols that might be put into place. In this case, we do not know the answer. We seek to be an active participant in the conversation moving forward—for everyone—first and foremost for the survivors.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Chuck Weber".

Chuck Weber
Kansas Catholic Conference

ADDENDUM:

Creating a Safe Environment—an Overview

Every member of the clergy, Consecrated Religious (sisters/nuns), employees and volunteers who have regular contact with a minor are required to attend, in person, an awareness and training session called Protecting God's Children for Adults. This training comes under an umbrella program called VIRTUS, which is a program and service of the National Catholic Risk Retention Group. It was put together by national experts in many disciplines focused on detecting, reporting and preventing child sexual abuse.

The word **virtus** is Latin, and means valor, moral strength, excellence, and worth. In ancient times, **virtus** denoted a way of life and manner of behavior that always aspired to the highest, most positive attributes of people and aspects of human interaction.

That's what we seek with the VIRTUS programs.

They are conducted in person by certified facilitators, then the program continues as a condition of your employment—clergy, teachers, other ministers—with regular monthly online training bulletins.

Just in the Diocese of Wichita—Southeast Kansas—more than 2,600 VIRTUS sessions have been held since 2002. More than 260 sessions last year alone. There are currently 34,000 active VIRTUS accounts.

In the Archdiocese of Kansas City in Kansas—northeast Kansas—more than 47,930 adults have been VIRTUS trained.

The Archdiocese has also conducted more than 41,000 background checks for adults who regularly work with minors. In fact, across the state of Kansas in Catholic communities, Wichita, Kansas City, Dodge City and Salina dioceses, tens of thousands of adults have cleared state and national background checks, and which are regularly renewed and checked against the Kansas Sex Offender Registry.

Independent Review Boards have been established, made up of experts in their fields--psychiatry, law enforcement, healthcare, parenting. It's not just the Bishops watching the store—they can't—it's the parishioner in the pew. This is OUR church! There are audits conducted and we screen young men wishing to enter the priesthood like never before to make sure they are psychologically and well as spiritually suited to the remarkable vocation of the priesthood.

Our diocesan Safe Environment Specialists include former special agents for the FBI, criminal prosecutors, psychologists and other experts who work every day to implement the directives set in place since 2002.

The reporting policy when it comes to suspected child abuse can be boiled down to three words: Nine. One. One. Call the police. Call DCF. Report it. If it involves someone in the Church, call law

enforcement and then report it to the Church—use our toll free confidential reporting line. We will also conduct our own investigation, in addition to and working with law enforcement.

No human endeavor is ever perfect or, often, even ever good enough. But Catholics have learned, in this crucible of shared pain and anger, some of the measures that do help, as far as any human space can be free from abuse, to work toward restoring trust in our Church. We hope that you find some comfort in what we have been doing and how far the Catholic Church has come.

On behalf of the Kansas Bishops, I pledge our full cooperation and participation with the Attorney General of Kansas, and every partnership available to rid our Church of the evil and bad shepherds who betrayed our trust and our children and set us all on a road to healing.