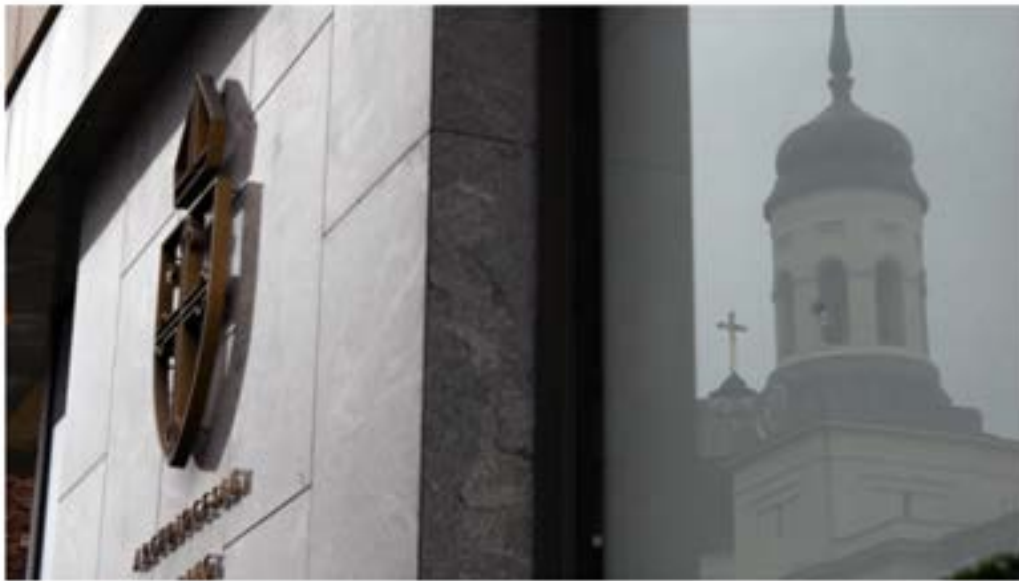


Sex abuse claim deadline passes with hundreds filing in Archdiocese of Baltimore bankruptcy



A view of the Basilica of the Assumption Catholic is reflected in a window of the Archdiocese of Baltimore offices.

Eric Hansman/Baltimore Sun



By ALEX MANN | amann@baltisun.com
June 3, 2024 at 3:07 p.m.

Hundreds of people who were sexually abused as children by employees of the Catholic Archdiocese of Baltimore filed in the church's bankruptcy case ahead of Friday's deadline for claims, but the exact figure remains unclear.

"Right now there are over 700, but the claims that were uploaded on Friday are still being counted," Paul Jan Zdunek, chair of the committee of abuse survivors representing all victims in the bankruptcy case, told The Baltimore Sun on Monday. "It's taking time. There was a rush at the end."

Zdunek said that figure "will probably go up." While it also includes non-abuse-related claims filed by insurers and other entities who did business with the archdiocese, "the majority will be abuse cases," he added.

It could take a while to determine the exact number of sex abuse claims filed in the case, said attorney Jonathan Schochor, who represents victims in the case, including a member of the survivor's committee.

“It’ll be at least two weeks because each firm who filed on behalf of survivors has to one, tally, and, two, look for duplicates,” said Schochor, adding that survivors sometimes submit claims independently of those filed for them by attorneys.

Although there may be limited opportunities for survivors to submit claims later if they meet a certain legal criteria, the vast majority of victims of clergy abuse had until midnight Friday to file in the archdiocese’s bankruptcy to be considered for compensation later in the case.

The [deadline marked a milestone](#) in the case, coming and going against the backdrop of another important development: Last week, the archdiocese and the survivor’s committee jointly asked to go into mediation to determine how much money the church and its insurers will contribute to compensate victims.

U.S. Bankruptcy Judge Michelle M. Harner has yet to approve that request.

The archdiocese [declared bankruptcy Sept. 29](#), two days before a new state law took effect that eliminated time limits for people abused as children to sue the perpetrators and the institutions that enabled their torment.

Lawmakers enacted the [Child Victims Act](#) after Maryland’s attorney general [released a report](#) examining abuse in the archdiocese. The report detailed the torment of more than 600 children and young adults at the hands of 156 clergy and other church officials, dating to the 1940s and spanning Baltimore and the nine counties in Central and Western Maryland that make up the diocese’s jurisdiction.

Anticipating hundreds of lawsuits under the new law, the church sought to protect its assets and limit its liability through bankruptcy. Diocesan officials also said bankruptcy would ensure the church compensated more survivors, rather than providing immense sums of money to a few, while continuing its mission.

The church’s decision meant survivors’ potential lawsuits had to be reconfigured into proof-of-claim forms and supporting documents. Harner set the deadline for such claims, ordering the archdiocese to advertise on news platforms and put the word out in its parishes. In a



Barbara Haddock Taylor/Baltimore Sun

Archbishop William Lori attended two hearings "to hear directly from the survivors" of abuse.

statement Thursday, Archbishop William Lori said the approaching deadline served as a "a stark reminder that behind each abuse-claim lies a personal and painful story."

"Our goals in filing for Chapter 11," Lori continued, "include compensating those individuals with the aim of helping to provide a possible path toward healing. ... We can never undo the harm that was done to many, nor can we lessen the evil of what has happened, we can however continue to walk with those who have been harmed and do all we can to contribute to their healing."

As survivors prepared and submitted claims, attorneys in the case sought to figure out how much money the archdiocese and its insurers would have to cough up to eventually compensate victims.

Tensions between the archdiocese and the insurance companies it retained over the years remain, as evidenced by an ongoing lawsuit by the church against several of its insurers alleging breach of contract, but the case is now likely heading to confidential mediation. Zdunek and Schochor expect mediation to begin over the summer.

"That mediation will involve the back and forth between the archdiocese, the insurers and the creditors committee in an attempt to arrive at what the creditor's committee believes is a fair dollar amount to compensate survivors," Schochor said.

The committee and archdiocese suggested Harner appoint as mediators Robert J. Faris, chief judge of the U.S. Bankruptcy Court in Hawaii, and attorney Brian J. Nash, who says on his LinkedIn page that he's focused his practice on mediation for more than two decades.

Zdunek touted the joint request as an important step toward an eventual resolution.

"It's huge," Zdunek said. "It shows that we are working together to resolve this as fair and justly as possible."

Once the church, its insurers and survivors agree to a sum to settle all the claims, it falls to Harner to approve the dollar amount.

After that, the survivors' committee will come up with criteria for how to categorize abuse claims. Experts will be brought in to evaluate the claims and place them into tiers for compensation.