

## ARCHDIOCESE OF BALTIMORE

320 Cathedral Street • Baltimore, Maryland 21201 • 410-547-5437 • FAX: 410-727-8234

OFFICE OF THE ARCHBISHOP

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Permit me to share with you a serious challenge our Church faces in addressing the scandal of child sexual abuse. We have been working on this issue for many years in collaboration with survivors, lay and clergy leadership, and all of you. However, the pain for many survivors and the need to remain ever vigilant for the safety of our children remains. So I reiterate our prayerful unity with those who suffer and renew our commitment to assist victims and protect children.

The Archdiocese continues to offer counseling and other treatment assistance to those who come forward with credible allegations of abuse regardless of the age of the allegation, and we consistently reach out to victims to learn if there is more we can do to meet their individual needs. Regrettably, nothing we provide can change the horrible past. We encourage victims to receive the medical help they need from professionals of their choice for as long as it is helpful, with the prayer that this will help them make progress toward the healing they rightly deserve.

Sadly, this is not enough for some. State lawmakers will soon once again consider a bill to suspend the civil statute of limitations for child abuse, an action that would leave this Archdiocese and its parishes and schools vulnerable to multi-million dollar lawsuits stemming from decades-old claims that would hurt all of us. Similar legislation passed in California a few years ago resulting in claims totaling \$1.8 billion, with approximately \$720 million going to trial lawyers. From St. Elizabeth Ann Seton in Crofton, St. Bernardine in Baltimore City, St. Francis Xavier in Hunt Valley, St. Michael in Poplar Springs to St. Patrick's in Cumberland, and every parish in between, we see vibrant parishes serving vital roles in communities throughout Maryland that could be seriously harmed by this legislation.

All of us want justice for those who were victimized as children. Gratefully, Maryland law is strong and among the nation's toughest on child abusers; child abusers can be criminally prosecuted until the day they die. Moreover, childhood victims currently have until the age of 25 to seek money damages through civil suits—a timeframe that was just extended beyond the normal 3 years in 2003.

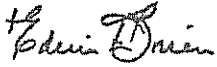
To suspend the civil statute of limitations retroactively for decades-old incidents, would do nothing to protect children and would not punish the guilty. Instead, it would do serious harm to the Church's mission and the people whom we serve today for tragedies that occurred many decades ago. It also unfairly targets private institutions such as the Catholic Church, since governmental entities such as public schools, foster homes, and juvenile facilities are protected by separate laws that require much earlier notification that suspected abuse has occurred, and/or that sharply limit the amount of damages that can be awarded.

The accompanying question-and-answer document has additional information about this issue. I invite you to review these materials and contact your state lawmakers to urge them to oppose this unprecedented suspension of the statute of limitations. To identify your elected officials, or to

find out how to contact them, please visit [www.mdcathcon.org](http://www.mdcathcon.org) and click on “find your legislator.” To further assist you, a sample letter to legislators can be found at [www.archbalt.org](http://www.archbalt.org).

Please join me in praying for all who have been impacted by the sin of sexual abuse, and be assured of my prayers for each of you as we prepare to embark together on our Lenten journey.

In the Lord,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Edwin O'Brien". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

+Edwin F. O'Brien  
Archbishop of Baltimore