

National Black Church Initiative

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Assemblyman Peter J Abbate, Jr.
8500 18th Avenue
Brooklyn, NY 11214

Dear Assemblyman Abbate:

The National Black Church Initiative, a coalition of 16,000 African American and Latino member churches and 18,000 sister churches, including 3,352 from within the state of New York, stands in support of abuse victims and innocent children. We support the Child Victims Act, sponsored by Assemblywoman Marge Markey and Senator Ruth Hassell-Thompson.

The NBCI has been fighting against neglect and abuse of infants through the NBCI Baby Fund for over ten years. With compassionate hearts our members have heard the cries of the adults today who had their innocence shattered in their youth by being sexually exploited and raped. The NBCI has been touched by the generosity of the victims who want to protect the innocent today and in the future and to ensure that no more children are hurt as they were.

The Rev. Paul Sowell, leader of NBCI Southern Faith Command, stated in March 2009, "We will continue our tradition here at the National Black Church Initiative of protecting those who are the most vulnerable. Our support of this legislation (The Child Victims Act) is consistent to our mission to be a place of healing, and not a barrier to God's love or his justice. This is simply the right thing to do."

While our hearts are heavy with knowledge of the suffering of the victims we are also saddened to take a position different from the Roman Catholic Church or our Jewish brothers and sisters. It is not easy but we must do this. As the Prophet Amos said, until justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream we must and do choose to stand with the vulnerable and the victims.

We are deeply ashamed of church officials and ministers who have abused their position of power both in abusing children and enabling known predators who have reoffended. That the church is willing to hide behind man's law so that it may violate God's holy law of mercy and grace is disgraceful.

In this case the church is the perpetrator of emotional and sexual violence upon God's children during their most vulnerable stages of growth. The science is clear; any time there is any form of trauma in the life of a child it devastates and transforms the soul. My heart cries out as a clergy whenever I am asked to speak out against the actions of the church because I deeply love the church and do not arrive at this stage easily.

However, in the case of the horrific unveiling of over 16,000 officially documented cases of abuse by priests, as is shown in the study by the John Jay College of Law, sanctioned by the US Conference of Catholic Bishops, the National Black Church Initiative cannot and will not be silent on the issue. We believe the Catholic church officials should do the most merciful thing and drop their opposition to extending the statute of limitations on these cases so that the process of healing can continue and peace, justice and mercy can be finally realized by those who have been victimized by these horrendous acts.

The good that will come by allowing victims the opportunity to expose the predators and their enablers cannot be measured. If even one child is protected because the neighbor or employer of a predator learned of their history and then keeps children away it is all worth it.

Rev. Anthony Evans
President