



CONSUMER ATTORNEYS OF CALIFORNIA

Seeking Justice for All

Molestation victims and attorneys overcome heavy lobbying push to win approval for SB 131 CAOC efforts help ensure victims their day in court

SACRAMENTO (Sept. 4, 2013) – An aggressive push in the Capitol by molestation victims and their attorneys overcame hard lobbying by the Catholic Church and other institutions as the Assembly today approved a measure aimed at opening the courthouse doors anew for decades-old cases.

SB 131 by Sen. Jim Beall (D-San Jose) now goes back to the Senate for a concurrence vote on amendments and then to the desk of Gov. Jerry Brown.

“This is a good day for justice,” said Brian Kabateck, president of the Consumer Attorneys of California. “Our organization has always been dedicated to ensuring access to justice. This measure will guarantee that victims of molestation who had been left out in the cold will have an opportunity to hold accountable perpetrators of child molestation.”

Kabateck commended Assembly members Nancy Skinner (D-Berkeley) and Bonnie Lowenthal (D-Long Beach) and Speaker John Perez (D-Los Angeles) for delivering impassioned floor speeches that propelled the bill to victory. The bill was heavily lobbied by foes, including the Catholic Church, Swim USA and other organizations hit by past molestation scandals.

A church-affiliated group hired a half dozen lobbying firms and spent big fighting SB 131. The effort by the church included visits by bishops to the Capitol as well as advocacy by priests from the pulpit to whip up parishioners who sent thousands letters and made scores of telephone calls to targeted lawmakers.

Over the past decade, California’s Catholic dioceses have paid \$1.2 billion in settlements and released thousands of confidential documents that showed church leaders conspired to shield admitted molesters from law enforcement.

In 2002, the Legislature approved a bill that lifted the statute of limitations on lawsuits for all of 2003, allowing dozens of claims to be filed for decades-old abuses. The key provision of Beall’s bill would lift the statute of limitations on molestation claims for another year, but only for a group who were 26 or older and missed the previous deadline because of abuse-related psychological problems.

Advocates say loosening time limits is crucial in sex-abuse cases because it often takes decades for victims to admit that they were molested and seek legal recourse.

Consumer Attorneys of California is a professional organization of plaintiffs’ attorneys representing consumers seeking accountability against wrongdoers in cases involving personal injury, product liability, environmental degradation and other causes.

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