



CONSUMER ATTORNEYS OF CALIFORNIA

Seeking Justice for All

CAOC helps score victory for molestation victims bill Measure wins final Senate approval and goes to Gov. Jerry Brown

SACRAMENTO (Sept. 6, 2013) – Scoring a big victory over institutions attempting to shield child abusers from accountability, the Consumer Attorneys of California joined with a coalition of molestation victims to help score a big win in the state Senate for a bill aimed at opening the courthouse doors anew for decades-old cases.

SB 131 by Sen. Jim Beall (D-San Jose) now goes to the desk of Gov. Jerry Brown, who will face heavy pressure from the Catholic Church, the Boy Scouts of America, Swim USA and other organizations that fear that the bill could make them a target for litigation.

“We have faith the governor will do the right thing and sign this important measure,” said Brian Kabateck, president of the Consumer Attorneys of California. “Our organization has always been dedicated to ensuring access to justice and that’s what this bill does – it guarantees that victims of molestation who had been left out in the cold will have an opportunity to hold perpetrators accountable.”

Kabateck commended the bill’s author, Beall, along with state Senate President Pro Tem Darrell Steinberg (D-Sacramento) and state Sen. Alex Padilla (D-Los Angeles), who cast the deciding 21st vote.

The bill was heavily lobbied by foes, including the Catholic Church, Swim USA and other organizations hit by molestation scandals in recent years. 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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