

Archdiocese of Baltimore Review Board provides accountability for victims of abuse

The Archdiocese of Baltimore was nine years ahead of schedule in 2002, when the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops mandated in the “Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People” that every diocese or archdiocese in the country have an independent board to review allegations of sexual misconduct by priests, employees and volunteers.

REVIEW BOARD MEMBERS

- **Judge Joseph F. Murphy** (*chairman*), retired judge of Maryland Court of Appeals, former Chief Judge of Maryland Court of Special Appeals and former Deputy State's Attorney for Baltimore City
- **Frederick H. Bealefeld III***, former police commissioner of Baltimore City
- **Beverly A. Cooper**, vice president, The Reginald F. Lewis Foundation, Inc.
- **Michael R. Enright**, managing director, Beowulf Energy
- **Judge Ellen M. Heller**, Retired Judge of the Circuit Court for Baltimore City
- **Monsignor Robert J. Jaskot**, pastor, St. Mary-St. Francis-Holy Family Catholic Community in Frederick County
- **Sr. Patricia M. McCarron, S.S.N.D., Ph.D.***, headmistress, Notre Dame Preparatory School
- **Mary Page Michel**, community volunteer
- **Dr. Samuel L. Ross**, chief executive officer, Bon Secours Baltimore Health System
- **Iona R. Rudisill***, Anti-Human Trafficking and Exploitation Program Manager, Baltimore City Child Abuse Center

Affiliations listed for identification purposes only.

* Indicates new members as of January 2018.

The charter, a comprehensive set of procedures promulgated by the USCCB for addressing allegations of sexual abuse of minors by Catholic clergy, also includes guidelines for reconciliation, healing, accountability and prevention of future acts of abuse. But back in 1993, the Archdiocese of Baltimore publicized written child protection policies and established an Independent Review Board.

“The (charter’s) guidelines include really promoting healing and reconciliation with victims and survivors of sexual abuse and guaranteeing an effective response to the abuse. Accountability, of course, is a very important part of that,” said **Jerri Burkhardt**, director of the Office of Child and Youth Protection for the archdiocese.

That includes an annual audit by an outside agency that ensures the archdiocese is following the charter in training personnel and volunteers, in reporting cases of suspected abuse to civil authorities, and reaching out to survivors.

It also includes an Independent Review Board, made up of at least five people, mostly lay people. This interfaith group includes people from the legal community and law enforcement, health care, academia and social work.

Burkhardt said she has come to respect and rely on the review board, not only to review individual allegations brought before them, but also to help shape archdiocesan policy in the future.

“They make sure that we actually live up to our policies ... to make sure that we are living up to the promises of our policy and of the charter,” she said.

Judge Joseph F. Murphy, who retired from the appellate courts in Maryland in 2011, currently chairs the Review Board. Before he joined the board in 2012, he was not aware of the diversity of the group, which includes people of other faiths and people from various ethnic and minority communities. “I really applaud people who, when they started out putting the board together, recognized the strength and the importance of this kind of professional, personal, political and religious diversity,” he said.

The board has an important role in both assisting particular victims as well as reducing future risk of child abuse. At each of its meetings, he said, the board

considers individual cases, but also discusses how the archdiocese will improve its response in the future and what an appropriate response should be.

He said the work of the Review Board is similar to work he did in the appellate court system for 18 years. "The appellate decisions are written, of course, to do justice to the parties to the particular case, but also to improve the quality of justice for future litigants so that trial judges will understand, for example, what is the correct approach to an upcoming problem." In a similar way, the Review Board, "reviews particular cases and what was done with particular claimants and particular persons charged with improper or questionable conduct and then provides recommendations about how best to avoid these kinds of problems in the future. ..."

"I have no doubt that the board's recommendations are given serious consideration," by the archbishop and archdiocesan personnel, Murphy said.

Beverly Cooper, who has served on the Review Board since its establishment in 1993, agreed that the archdiocese takes recommendations seriously and usually implements them. "It's very much a cohesive partnership," she said. She has served on the board under three archbishops - Cardinals William H. Keeler and Edwin F. O'Brien, and Archbishop William E. Lori. "It's not that the archbishop is above us and saying, 'no' about this and 'no' about that. He appreciates what we're doing."

She said some of the stories that the board hears about individual victims can be hard to hear.

It helps that people know the Review Board is available as a kind of watchdog. Although victims are encouraged to report allegations to civil authorities and the police (and the archdiocese itself always reports allegations of abuse), "the fact that there's somewhere else that they can go and report it is something that's very positive," Cooper said. "And the fact that we haven't seen as many egregious allegations as there were earlier is definitely positive."

The independence of the Review Board is important, she said, "mainly so that the adjudication of these allegations of abuse is shown to be above reproach."

Frederick H. Bealefeld III, former police commissioner of Baltimore City, joined the

Review Board this year. He brings his experience as a police officer, an investigator and commissioner to the process – “31 years in domestic law enforcement and being a guardian of investigative processes,” he said.

“It says a lot about the archdiocese and the church that they are opening themselves up and committed to this kind of internal examination and review to ensure the integrity of what they do is where it should be.

“In my professional life, the people I want to associate with are the people who are constantly open to self-examination and doing better,” Bealefeld said.

He said he knows what “right” looks like from a law-enforcement standpoint and can help provide guidance if outside investigations are necessary. “I certainly know law enforcement and investigative processes and how that should be done.”

He said he wants to give back to the community and appreciates the important work the archdiocese does, adding that the church is “dedicated to getting it right and dedicated to delivering service.”

Bealefeld said, “I won’t hesitate to share my point of view. I am confident I will have that kind of support to offer my insight, input and guidance where it’s appropriate.”

Retired Judge Ellen M. Heller has also served on the Review Board under the last three archbishops, having joined the board in 2004. She said she was proud to have been nominated to serve and takes the responsibility seriously, especially as the only Jewish member.

The archdiocese investigates each allegation of sexual misconduct or abuse and could do so even without an independent review board, Heller said. However, the independence of the Review Board “makes the whole process more complete,” she said.

She also noted that the board makes sure the process is fair to the victims and to those accused, because “not all allegations are correct. We have to be fair in the process to the person who brought the charge and allegations on the person accused,” she said.

“I think the Review Board can give (victims) confidence that at this time and place, any allegation will be taken very seriously and will be followed up,” she said. “They can feel great confidence that the archdiocese will take the allegation seriously, investigate it, send it to the Review Board, and do all it can, if something happened, to remedy it.”

She recalled certain cases brought to the board where abuse occurred despite strong archdiocesan policies to minimize the risk of abuse. In those cases, the Review Board helps advise the archbishop and archdiocesan personnel on how to strengthen policies and processes further.

Heller, who became a judge in 1986, most recently served as associate judge on the Baltimore City Circuit Court and has been formally retired since 2003. She said no one can “minimize the lifelong, horrible impact” on victims of abuse, but that the work of the Review Board can provide a sense of accountability to the victims.

“Allegations involving mental or physical harm (to children) – especially sexual harm and abuse – have to be taken seriously because they can result in significant harm,” Heller said. “I take it seriously, as do all the other members” of the board.

REPORTING ABUSE

The Archdiocese of Baltimore complies with Maryland laws requiring reporting suspected child abuse to civil authorities. Under Maryland Law, any person who has reason to believe a child has been subjected to abuse must report the suspected abuse to civil authorities, even if the potential victim is now over 18 years old and even in cases where the alleged perpetrator is deceased.

If someone associated with the Church, including clergy, employees or volunteers of the Archdiocese of Baltimore, is suspected of abuse, then the suspected abuse must also be reported to the Archdiocesan, Office of Child and Youth at 410-547-5438 or the Victim Assistance Line at 1-866-417-7469.

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CHARTER FOR THE PROTECTION OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

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