

# Bishops support stiffer penalties for child sex abuse

FRANKFORT, Ky. – Kentucky’s four Catholic bishops expressed support for a bill in the state Legislature that would stiffen penalties for people in a position of trust who sexually abuse minors and for people who fail to report such abuse.

The bill “will effectively protect young people from sexual predators” and “will encourage public and private institutions to be vigilant in protecting children entrusted to their care,” said a statement issued by the Catholic Conference of Kentucky.

“The legislation appropriately increases the penalty for acts by a person in a position of authority or position of special trust as a way to hold those persons accountable,” said the Feb. 1 statement.

Under the bill, anyone in a position of trust or authority – such as a clergyman, teacher or coach – who has sexual contact with a minor would be guilty of a felony. The bill would raise some types of sexual abuse involving young teens from a misdemeanor to a felony.

Penalties for failing to report suspected child abuse or neglect also would be increased, said Rep. Jim Wayne, a Democrat from Louisville, the bill’s sponsor.

The bishops’ statement “shows their commitment to protecting children,” said Wayne.

In recent years, the Louisville Archdiocese and the Covington Diocese have settled multimillion-dollar lawsuits with plaintiffs in child sex abuse cases.

The four Kentucky bishops are: Louisville Archbishop Joseph E. Kurtz, Owensboro Bishop John J. McRaith, Covington Bishop Roger J. Foys and Lexington Bishop Ronald W. Gainer.