

Lori urged not to appeal release of priest abuse files

Supporters of sex abuse victims ask diocese to release documents

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BRIDGEPORT-- More than a dozen victims of sexual abuse by priests and their supporters marched to the Catholic Center Tuesday afternoon to urge Bishop William E. Lori not to pursue any appeals to block the release of thousands of documents detailing abuse by clergy since the 1960s.

But Lori was not available, so the protesters left a letter at the front desk and were given a written response from Bridgeport diocese officials.

"We are simply asking the bishop to stop this brutal, expensive legal battle and do the right thing and let these records out," said David Clohessy, director of the Chicago-based Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests, who led the march up the tree-lined drive to the seat of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Bridgeport on Jewett Street. "The public and parishioners need to know who molested children and who enabled this crime to take place."

On Friday the state Supreme Court removed the last hurdle to the release of the documents produced by the diocese by court order under seal. The documents were submitted as part of more than a dozen lawsuits filed by people who claimed they were abused as children by priests in the diocese since the 1970s.

The thousands of documents are being stored in Waterbury Superior Court. Some of the documents, reviewed by the Connecticut Post, detail accusations of abuse by priests and efforts that were taken by then-Bishop Edward Egan to hide the abuse.

The diocese has 10 days to block the documents' release with a further appeal.

In a written statement handed to protesters Tuesday, Diocese spokesman Joseph McAleer stated the diocese is "currently reviewing its options in response to the Connecticut Supreme Court decision." He said that their primary objection to the decision concerns judicial fairness.

"In a state where the Catholic church has had to vigorously fight for its constitutional rights, we are going to continue to examine any and all legal options," he stated.

But Joseph O'Callaghan, founder of the local branch of Voice of the Faithful, an organization of Catholics who support more lay involvement in the running of the church, urged Lori to allow the release of the documents.

"While paying lip service to transparency, they have steadfastly resisted publication of court documents that will reveal the extent of their complicity and that of their subordinates in the crime of sexual abuse of children," he said.