

Dear Ms. Fox:

We, Catholic Whistleblowers, are a group of lay men and women, religious sisters, priests, and former priests and brothers who are dedicated to supporting clergy sexual abuse victims. We have submitted documents to the Vatican, White House, and others requesting investigations of dioceses and archdioceses throughout the country and world regarding clergy sexual abuse. Each of us has been criticized, marginalized, and dismissed for challenging Church leadership to change its ways regarding clergy sexual abuse.

Today, April 29, 2022, we were made aware of a study conducted by VOTF National regarding the compliance of dioceses and archdioceses regarding clergy sexual abuse. While your efforts and intentions were laudable, we believe with all due respect that the study is sorely lacking and in need of removal from widespread dissemination. One of our members, a canon lawyer, begins our concern about the study in the following manner:

***"The VOTF study is an "online review of diocesan compliance with child protection guidelines." Online means that VOTF relied on the accuracy of the diocesan or archdiocesan websites' information. The websites simply put up "fronts" that the bishops want to show, nothing more."***

*The canon lawyer continues with two more points:*

*First, "There is no independent verification that all allegations that ought to be sent to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) actually were or are sent. Nor is there any audit of diocesan compliance with the Essential Norms. Catholic Whistleblowers has spoken about both points. The "Charter Audit" is restricted by the USCCB to an audit of the Charter. I have a letter from Bishop Conlon when he chaired the USCCB child protection committee and an email from Dr. Cesareo when he was Chair of the National Review Board and both agreed with me on both points. Conlon and Cesareo both place the fault on the USCCB, that the bishops will not allow an audit of the Essential Norms or a verification that all cases that should be sent to the CDF actually are sent."*

*Second, "On the local level, the Archdiocese of Milwaukee lists 48 diocesan priests against whom there are substantiated allegations. The Diocese of Green Bay lists 50 diocesan priests, yet Green Bay has approximately 50% the number of priests as does Milwaukee. Green Bay is half the size of Milwaukee, yet lists more names than does Milwaukee. Where are the other Milwaukee names? They are sealed in the bankruptcy court files of the Milwaukee bankruptcy case. This reality has been well-communicated to the Wisconsin Department of Justice that is one year into an investigation. I contend that hiding those names in the bankruptcy court files was the real goal of the archdiocese in filing for bankruptcy; a mission accomplished." (Submitted by Rev. James Connell, J.C.D., Milwaukee, Wisconsin)*

*A second member of the Whistleblowers' group, also a canon lawyer, offers three essential insights:*

**First,** *"I believe Catholic groups like VOTF need to be educated consistently about those of us who work in the trenches. My work in litigation and bankruptcy processes has taught me that many Catholics do not want to hear the horror stories about the maltreatment of victims and their attorneys and advocates. By the 'trenches,' I mean what is actually happening at this very moment.*

*The New York State bishops spent 10 million dollars to defeat the Child Victims' Act. Because of the bravery and perseverance of members of the survivor community, the bishops lost in New York and New Jersey, creating a flood of cases on the East coast and in California.*

*The Church's civil attorneys have consistently used brutal tactics to either discourage, frighten, or discredit victims. In spite of bishops' public announcements that they want to help victims (actually, it is the well-paid public relations firms that put the words in the bishops' mouths), their actions toward victims through their lawyers reveal their continuously destructive efforts.*

*Essentially, the dioceses challenge civil cases of individuals and survivors, spend hundreds of millions of dollars of Catholics' donations, and their attorneys use stall tactics that would defy the imagination.*

*Between 2004 and 2019, the bishops spent \$644,000,000.00 in attorneys' fees, more than a half a billion dollars."*

**Second,** *"The bishops' collective focus is on policies and protocols for the protection of children which is a distraction from the total picture. What the bishops should be doing is helping the countless survivors whose lives have been shattered by sexual abuse and the Church's institutional response. Diocesan programs and efforts to help victims are not uniform by any means and usually are limited to psychological counseling.*

*There is yet to be an organized effort by the U.S. Bishops, and the Holy See for that matter, to study the profound spiritual damage done to victims, their families, and, indeed, the entire Church. Bishops' words and actions are empty platitudes of extraordinary callousness."*

**Third,** *"The data on diocesan websites does not provide a clear and accurate picture for a number of reasons, but chief among them is the fact that it does not provide information on fundamental issues, especially the profoundly destructive effects of sexual abuse on individuals and the equally damaging effects and attitudes and actions the office-holders of the institutional Church have had on them."* (Submitted by Thomas P. Doyle, J.C.D., Vienna, VA)



In addition to the aforementioned issues involved, we believe VOTF should consider the following:

- 1) ***How did the study gain traction within VOTF? I am the victim representative of VOTF NJ, and I had no knowledge of such a study (Submitted by Robert M. Hoatson, Ph.D.)***
- 2) The inquiry used information from diocesan and archdiocesan offices which are the last places from which Catholic Whistleblowers would seek information about clergy sexual abuse.
- 3) Were victim/survivors engaged in the study? Were experts in the field consulted (Catholic Whistleblowers, advocacy agencies, attorneys for victims, etc)? If not, why not?
- 4) The study is dangerous in that it gives bishops more ammunition to re-victimize and re-traumatize innocent victim/survivors. Therefore, we respectfully ask that you remove the study.
- 5) We advocates and victim/survivors have been making strides of late holding bishops accountable not only for their own abuse of children, but their cover-ups as well. Your study may delay our progress and allow bishops to hide more and more information.
- 6) Your study was not independent since the information received by the bishops (or their representatives) is unreliable and not independent. The Department of Justice is the proper venue to investigate the Church, in our opinion. **(Submitted by Catholic Whistleblowers)**

Please remove the study from your website and all other venues. Thank you.

April 29, 2022 – (You might address all responses to [roberthoatson@gmail.com](mailto:roberthoatson@gmail.com))

Sincerely,

**Catholic Whistleblowers**

Mrs. Helen Rainforth, IL  
Fr. John Bambrick, NJ  
Fr. Bruce Teague, MA  
Sr. Sally Butler, OP, NY  
Rev. James Connell, WI  
Rev. Patrick Collins, MI  
Thomas P. Doyle, VA  
Rev. Ronald Lemmert, NY  
Rev. Msgr. Kenneth Lasch, NJ  
Sr. Claire Smith, OSU, NY  
Patrick Wall, CA  
Rev. Mark White, VA  
Robert M. Hoatson, NJ