



10 things to know about Archdiocese of Washington's Child Protection and Safe Environment Policy

- **The Archdiocese of Washington's *Child Protection Policy* was instituted in 1986 as one of the first such policies in the nation and has been used as a model for dioceses nationwide.**

The policy – which covers healing, reporting and prevention of abuse – was updated in 1993, 1999, 2003, 2007 and 2013 to incorporate enhancements in child protection mandates and oversight.

- **In July 2019, the policy was again revised, with a new title that reflects its expanded scope, as the archdiocese's *Child Protection and Safe Environment Policy*,**

to emphasize the importance of ensuring safe environments for people of all ages, protecting children from sexual abuse and adults from sexual harassment or abuses of power.

- The revised policy's introduction makes that expanded scope clear, stating, "All people – children and adults – have the right to be safe and protected from harm in any and all environments – home, school, religious institutions, neighborhoods, and communities."

The policy states, **"The Archdiocese of Washington embraces**

this right to safety and is dedicated to promoting and ensuring the protection of all children entrusted to our care and to all adults who receive pastoral care or serve our mission."

- **The policy requires mandatory reporting of suspected child abuse and immediate removal of someone credibly accused of abuse.** Courtney Chase, the executive director of the archdiocese's Office of Child Protection and Safe Environment, noted, "Any employee, volunteer, clergy or religious who receives a disclosure of abuse or suspects any child abuse or maltreatment is mandated

to report it to civil authorities, (and) the school or parish cooperates with civil authorities while the investigation is conducted." She added, "When an allegation is made against an individual, they are immediately removed and the investigation commences. There is zero leniency when an allegation is made."

- **The policy emphasizes transparency and pastoral care in abuse cases.** Chase noted that when an abuse allegation is made against someone affiliated with the archdiocese, "the community is made aware," and "therapeutic services are offered to

victims/survivors and family members to ensure the healing process immediately begins."

- **The policy requires that "all clergy, employees and volunteers who will come into contact with children while working or volunteering for any archdiocesan institution and/or program will undergo the relevant state and federal criminal background checks."** The Archdiocese of Washington is requiring those who work or volunteer with young people to be fingerprinted rather than undergo an electronic background check as in the past, because fingerprinting provides more comprehensive information, ensuring the archdiocese has the highest level of protection and oversight.

- **The policy includes an educational component for children and youth, and also for adult staff members and volunteers, designed to help prevent abuse from happening.** Adults who work or volunteer with youth are required to attend training sessions, where topics include appropriate boundaries for ministry, and how to recognize warning signs of abuse in children and youth. Children and youth attending Catholic schools and parish





(Catholic Standard file photo/Jaclyn Lippelmann)

programs receive age and developmentally appropriate training on topics including basic safety skills, how to recognize dangerous or abusive situations, identifying trusted adults with whom to speak, and on the ability to safely interact with technology, including the Internet and mobile devices.

• **The revised policy has an expanded scope emphasizing safe environments for adults working or volunteering in church ministries and outreach.**

The revised policy includes the Archdiocese of Washington's Pastoral Code of Conduct, and on the issue of harassment, that code states: "Clergy, staff and volunteers must not engage in physical, psychological, written or verbal harassment of staff, volunteers or parishioners and must not tolerate such harassment by

other church staff or volunteers." That code goes on to say, "Clergy, staff and volunteers shall provide a professional work environment that is free from physical, psychological, written or verbal intimidation or harassment." The code requires that allegations of harassment be taken seriously and reported immediately to the Child Protection and Safe Environment Office, the Office of Human Resources and in the case of clergy, the Office of the Vicar for Clergy.

• **The Archdiocese of Washington was one of the first in the nation to have a Child Protection Advisory Board, which includes professionals from clinical, law enforcement and pastoral backgrounds, and an abuse survivor.** Now called the Child Protection and Safe

Environment Advisory Board, their name and work has been changed to reflect the policy's expanded focus. The members review archdiocesan child protection and safe environment policies and procedures and recommend ways they can be improved and strengthened, oversee the implementation of the policies, assess effectiveness of victim assistance efforts and advise on standards of conduct for people in positions of trust. The members also serve as the archdiocese's Case Review Board, assessing allegations of sexual abuse of minors or improper adult conduct, helping to determine if allegations of abuse or misconduct are credible.

• **Cardinal Wilton Gregory, who was installed as the archbishop of Washington in May 2019, two months**

before the revised *Child Protection and Safe Environment Policy* was issued, has been a national leader in the Church's efforts to address the abuse crisis.

As the bishop of Belleville, Illinois in 2002, he served as the president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and led the nation's bishops in implementing the "Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People," which included a "zero tolerance policy" on priests who abuse children.

*The Archdiocese of Washington's Office of Child and Youth Protection and Safe Environment can be reached by calling 301-853-5328, and information and the text of the revised *Child Protection and Safe Environment Policy* can be found online at <https://adv.org/about-us/resources/child-protection/>*