

VICTIMS' HOPE

Urge survivors of church abuse to file claim

Shaun Dougherty (left) and Brian Toale, both victims of child sex abuse by Catholic clergy, say restitution program created by Timothy Cardinal Dolan (inset) is one step toward preventing future abuse. Dougherty holds photos of himself and priest who abused him.



BY DALE W. EISINGER and STEPHEN REX BROWN
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VICTIMS OF sexual abuse by priests urged fellow survivors Monday to enroll in a compensation program founded by Timothy Cardinal Dolan.

Phase II of the Independent Reconciliation and Compensation Program is open to anyone who has not previously reported a complaint of abuse to the Archdiocese.

Only victims abused by a deacon or priest in the Archdiocese of New York are eligible.

Applicants face a July 31 deadline.

"Your window of opportunity is only open until the end of July," said Shaun Dougherty, 47, who was abused as a child by a priest in Pennsylvania.

"Protect future generations of children from having to live the nightmare that we lived again."

The program's initial phase, which was only open to people

who had made previously documented claims of abuse to the Archdiocese, concluded earlier this year.

Camille Biros, an attorney administering the program, said 145 people submitted claims in phase I, and that 117 had accepted settlement offers. She said 23 people were still contemplating an offer and five claims were still being analyzed.

Thus far, no one had declined a settlement, which comes with an agreement the victim will never take his case to court.

The three abuse survivors, who spoke on the steps of St. Patrick's Cathedral, said they hoped an avalanche of applications in phase II would add momentum to efforts at reform of the state's strict statute of limita-

tions on claims of child sexual abuse.

Currently, victims must come forward by the age of 23 or else their attackers can dodge prosecution. The Daily News spearheaded a campaign last year urging reform of the law.



"Cardinal Dolan has come out with a plan... it is a giant step in the right direction. It is a plan that — for some people — may be, no pun intended, a god-send," said survivor

Brian Toale, 63, who was abused on Long Island, disqualifying him from the program

"If someone is not disposed to go to court, if someone is in a situation where they don't have the time for a law to be changed, this is definitely the way to go."

So far, 39 people were

deemed eligible for phase II, Biros said.

She added that 80 people had submitted claims that were ineligible because they alleged abuse by a priest not in the Archdiocese of New York.

Archdiocese spokesman Joseph Zwilling said the program was working well.

"We are certainly encouraging everyone who experienced abuse by a priest or deacon of the Archdiocese to come forward," he said.

Dolan announced the creation of the program last October, calling abuse by priests "nauseating."

Biros is independently administering the program with attorney Kenneth Feinberg, who oversees efforts to compensate victims of the 9/11 attacks.

In February, the Archdiocese sought court approval for a \$100 million loan using land behind St. Patrick's as collateral. The money will be used to pay abuse settlements.