

Church fights to keep priest investigation secret Rockford  
Diocese says it can't turn over information in the case of  
teenager's rape

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Somewhere inside the office of the Roman Catholic Church's Rockford Diocese is a secret lockbox.

Kane County prosecutors say that box likely contains papers, memos and notes from an internal diocese investigation that might detail damaging information about now-defrocked priest Mark **Campobello**.

**Campobello**, 38, is awaiting trial, charged with raping a teenage girl in Geneva four years ago. On Wednesday, prosecutors and an attorney for the diocese argued over a constitutional issue:

Should the secret information be handed over to authorities as prosecutors say it should? Or, is the investigation, apparently conducted by a priest who answered to a church-appointed panel, protected from prying government eyes by the First Amendment?

"If we were forced to hand over these documents, it would obliterate the wall that separates church and state," Ellen B. Lynch, an attorney for the diocese, told Judge Timothy Sheldon on Wednesday.

Sheldon, citing voluminous paperwork he needed to review, delayed ruling on the matter until May 22.

At issue is whether the documents prosecutors seek are privileged and confidential. Lynch cited Supreme Court cases from the 1800s that backed that contention.

She never confirmed in open court that the documents contained anything specific about **Campobello** or his case, only that there is indeed a secret, locked archive within the diocese.

The one key to that archive is held by the bishop. Inside is information collected and reviewed by a "misconduct officer" and an "intervention team."

Prosecutors said they learned about all of this when Geneva detectives investigating the **Campobello** case stumbled upon the church investigators.

Prosecutors said witnesses already had been interviewed weeks, if not months, before the alleged victim first approached police last October.

Detectives learned that on Oct. 2, the woman - now 18 - was contacted by someone purporting to be an attorney for the diocese, said Kane County Assistant State's Attorney Jody Gleason.

She refused to talk to that person, Gleason said.

Police also learned that church investigators had pulled a teacher at an undisclosed school out of her class to interview her about the **Campobello** case.

Outside of court, Gleason and fellow Assistant State's Attorney Nemura Pencyla refused to elaborate on what else they know about the church investigation, but they said in court that it appeared obvious the church had collected information about **Campobello**, and they feel entitled to that information.

"We are not asking for privileged information here," Pencyla said.

Lynch disagreed, telling Sheldon both church law and U.S. law prohibit the disclosure of the confidential paperwork because they pertain to the inner workings and decision making of the Roman Catholic Church.

"Disclosure would force a violation of our own laws, the laws of our own church," Lynch said. "This is something the diocese cannot do."