

# No Headline

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Whose interests are being protected?

The state's 2nd District Appellate Court eventually will decide the case on its legal merits.

But in the court of public opinion - which matters to a church trying to restore confidence among much of its own membership - it is understandable if some people conclude that segments of the Catholic church have learned little or nothing from its devastating sex abuse scandals.

Attorneys for the Rockford Diocese on Thursday invoked First Amendment protection of religious freedom in the diocese's ongoing refusal to turn internal investigation records over to Kane County prosecutors.

The state's attorney's office has been seeking the records as it prepares to prosecute former Geneva priest Mark **Campobello** on charges of child sexual abuse. **Campobello** faces two trials, one slated to begin May 24 on allegations that he abused a 14-year-old Geneva girl in 1999 and a second, not yet scheduled, on accusations that he abused a 16-year-old Aurora girl in 1999 and 2000.

The Rockford Diocese finds itself seeking a favorable ruling from the appellate court because a Kane County circuit court rejected its arguments a year ago. In fact, Judge Timothy Sheldon found the diocese to be in contempt of court for its refusal to hand over records from its internal investigation of **Campobello**.

An attorney for the diocese told the appellate court Thursday that "the church is trying to do something positive and beneficial to address this problem, and the state is trying to use it against them."

The attorney also asserted that society has a lot riding on the outcome of the case and that "religious freedoms are important to society."

An understatement, to say the least. But many reasonable observers join prosecutors in questioning where the issue of religious freedom comes into play in this and similar instances in which church officials have declined to cooperate with civic authorities in criminal investigations and prosecutions. And how, exactly, is the diocese's internal investigation being applied in positive and beneficial ways in this instance?

As appellate prosecutor Kris Karlin opined, "abuse by a Catholic priest is not a religious process. They can't hide behind confidentiality of canon law."

Karlin's assessment resonates for those who have been appalled by revelation after revelation of a

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particular church or diocese failing to act, either on its own or in concert with civil authorities, to protect children even after it learned of abuse cases.

Again, **Campobello** will have his day in court, and the diocese will have its chance for a favorable ruling from the appellate court as well.

Yet, many people, including many Catholics, have trouble reconciling on one hand the diocese's refusal to cooperate and on the other the ongoing efforts of Catholic bishops to both identify and accept accountability for cases of abuse dating back decades.