

Judge to allow girl to testify at priest's trial

Publication Northwest Herald
Date April 09, 2004
Section(s) Local News
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ST. CHARLES - A girl who claims that she was molested in Aurora by a former priest can testify against him on similar charges that he faces in Geneva.

Mark A. **Campobello**, 39, has pleaded not guilty to aggravated criminal sexual assault and aggravated criminal sexual abuse for alleged acts in 1999 with a 14-year-old girl while he ministered at St. Peter Catholic Church in Geneva.

Campobello, of Belvidere, also is accused of similar crimes that investigators contend occurred in 1999 and 2000 with a 15-year-old girl who was a student at Aurora Central Catholic High School, where he also worked.

Campobello had asked to bar the girl in the Aurora case from testifying, claiming that prosecutors want to inappropriately try both cases and link him to other sex-abuse scandals involving clergy.

Prosecutors maintain that state law allows testimony from the girl to illustrate a pattern of sexual abuse, even though **Campobello** has not stood trial in either case.

On Thursday, Judge Timothy Q. Sheldon denied **Campobello's** request, noting that Illinois allows such evidence to bolster cases against sex offenders accused of multiple offenses.

Illinois lawmakers in 1998 changed state law to allow testimony from multiple victims in sex-abuse cases.

Attorney Van Richards of Elgin said he was not surprised by the ruling but added that testimony from the girl in the Aurora case on the Geneva charges jeopardizes **Campobello's** chance for a fair trial.

"He has no prior record, so he's analogizing it to pedophile-like behavior," Richards said of the judge's decision. "Which I don't think is fair."

Campobello was a parochial administrator at St. James Parish in Belvidere when he was arrested on the Geneva charges in November 2002. The Rockford Diocese stripped him of his duties in December 2002.

He was indicted on the Aurora charges in October 2002 and is free on bond. If convicted of the most serious offenses, **Campobello** could face up to 15 years in prison.

The diocese launched an investigation into **Campobello's** behavior before his arrest and later was ordered to share its findings. The diocese refused and has appealed the matter to the Illinois 2nd District Appellate Court in Elgin.

Campobello is a 1983 graduate of Crystal Lake High School. He was ordained in 1991 and served in Rockford, Crystal Lake and Belvidere before being assigned to Kane County.