

# Rendell signs bills on child-sex offenders

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**HARRISBURG** | Gov. Ed Rendell on Wednesday signed a package of bills intended to toughen penalties for sex offenders who prey on children, including a measure that would make changes recommended by a Philadelphia grand jury that investigated abuse by Roman Catholic priests.

The legislation would give alleged victims of child-sex crimes until their 50th birthday to file criminal complaints, 20 years longer than current law allows.

Employers and supervisors could be held criminally liable if they know of alleged abuse by employees who care for children but fail to stop it, and caregivers would have to report suspected abuse regardless of whether the victim reports it.

The grand jury recommended legislative reforms in a September 2005 report that documented alleged assaults on minors by more than 60 priests in the Philadelphia Archdiocese since 1967. The report also accused church leaders of covering up the abuse.

The panel said that, under the law at the time, too much time had elapsed for criminal charges to be filed against the church or the priests.

"The report concluded that there were many loopholes existing in the law and gaps in the law that allowed those who commit these kind of sex crimes against children to get away with them," Rendell said.

He said the expansion of the statute of limitations on seeking criminal prosecution was important because "often, people don't feel comfortable bringing up these type of things that happened until long into their 30s and 40s."

John Salveson, founder and president of the Bryn Mawr-based Foundation to Abolish Child Sex Abuse, praised the new law, saying the provision holding employers and supervisors responsible for protecting children from sexual abuse by employees was critical.

"I think it's far more outrageous when a supposedly healthy, responsible person looks the other way and allows sex abuse of kids to continue," Salveson said. "If [the law] was in place a year and a half ago, would there have been indictments that came out of that grand jury? Absolutely."

The new law also requires additional information on sex offenders to be posted on the state's Megan's Law Web site, including the complete addresses of all offenders and whether their victims were children. The site now lists only the full addresses of offenders considered to be sexually violent predators.