

## May 1, 2017; Public Law 33-187 Revisited

As I near the end of my series on family-related laws passed by the 33<sup>rd</sup> Guam Legislature, I once again turn my attention to a new statute that has received tremendous public attention since its passage in September 2016, Public Law 33-187. This law removed the statute of limitations for acts of sexual assault and allowed long ago sexual assault victims to sue both the abuser and those institutions that failed to stop the abuse.

Since the law passed, more than fifty people have filed lawsuits against the Catholic Church. A few cases have also been filed against the Boy Scouts of America. There is a strong probability that more lawsuits will follow.

Those who have filed claims against the Church and the Boy Scouts allege that various priests sexually molested them. Two of these priests later served as Archbishops. From what we have learned so far, the abuse appears to have been widespread, frequent, and intentionally suppressed by Church officials.

The unfolding events clearly demonstrate the power of laws to address egregious wrongs. For more than 50 years, these alleged acts of sexual abuse and cover-up went officially undetected and unpunished. Why this is true is the subject of some debate. However, what isn't subject to debate is the fact that but for the passage of Public Law 33-187, these victims would never have had the opportunity to seek and receive justice.

Because of this fact, I was both amused and nauseated by the recent comments of Attorney Mike Caspino, the director of Hope and Healing, the Archdiocese of Agana's newly created program allegedly designed to help sexual abuse victims in the healing process. With crocodile tears, Mr. Caspino said "nothing can be resolved through litigation." His goal seems to be to convince victims to seek the conciliating services of Hope and Healing rather than litigating these matters in court.

Mr. Caspino and the Archdiocese are a day late and a dollar short with the introduction of Hope and Healing. Or, more accurately, they decades late and millions of dollars short in trying to stem the community's righteous outrage resulting from multiple allegations of Church affiliated sexual abuse.

The simple question is, what took Church officials so long to address this horrendous situation and why all of a sudden is the Archdiocese expressing concern?

Let's be real - without litigation the Church would never have acknowledged the alleged grievous wrongs committed by priests or offered to assist victims in the healing process. Just like most other archdioceses across the United States, the

Archdiocese of Agana took no action to address the situation until its pocketbook was threatened.

How sad and ironic that monetary concerns moved Church officials to action rather than moral indignation. The failure by the Church to investigate this matter years ago represents a gross dereliction of duty and undermines public trust.

Few laws hold out the hope for retribution and healing as does Public Law 33-187. My hope is that the litigation continues long enough to reveal the extent of the sexual abuse, to identify all those who abused children, and to expose all Church officials who looked the other way while these horrendous incidents occurred. This is the only way to prevent a reoccurrence of this type of atrocity in the future.