

September 26, 2016: Be informed about Sex Abuse

Like many others on Guam, I woke up Saturday morning wondering what the future holds for us as a community. With Governor Calvo's signature of approval to Bill 326, we are on an uncharted course of attempting to hold a religious institution accountable for alleged acts that, if true, are both morally and legally deplorable. This is going to take some time to sink in.

There is no doubt that Governor Calvo anguished over his decision to let the courts decide the merits of the public accusations of child sexual abuse made against Catholic priests. He deserves our thanks and appreciation, as does the Guam Legislature, for opening a legal channel for child abuse victims to seek justice and retribution. The difficult journey these victims face will be easier to endure with the knowledge that a large segment of the community stands united behind them.

So, what happens now? In light of the Governor's action, we can expect an outburst of loud and lively public comment. I suspect that after a couple of weeks things will quiet down. There will be a shift from public to private conversations that will take place within families trying to determine if any members suffered child sexual abuse at the hands of persons in authority. Hopefully, families will encourage victimized relatives to come forward with their accusations. To optimize the healing process, victims will need strong family support throughout the long legal ordeal.

Victims will next need to retain a reputable attorney to represent them in moving forward. The attorney should have a strong background in personal injury law and a proven track record of successful trial litigation experience. Do not hesitate to ask an attorney to cite specific examples of his or her trial experience, along with the outcomes. Before making a final decision, meet with several attorneys and talk to their former clients, if possible.

Obviously, a top concern for victims and their families will be how to fund the lawsuit. These types of cases can be very expensive to prosecute. Most clients don't have the upfront financial resources to bring these matters to trial. As a result, lawyers will usually take these cases on a contingency basis. That is, rather than charge an hourly rate and require the client to deposit a sizable upfront retainer, the lawyer will instead receive a certain percentage of any money awarded by the judge. So, the lawyer only gets paid if the client wins the case and money damages are awarded. Although attorneys usually request one-third of the monetary award, the percentage is negotiable.

Next week, I'll discuss the anatomy of civil trial. Hopefully, this will give the community insight into what we can expect to happen as the legal process unfolds.

In the meantime, to strengthen the community's resolve to see justice carried out, I encourage every adult on Guam to watch this year's Academy Award winner

for Best Picture, *Spotlight*. It's available on Netflix. This is the true story of how *Boston Globe* newspaper reporters uncovered a widespread child sex abuse scandal within the Catholic Boston Archdiocese. What started out as an accusation against one priest eventually grew to include accusations against 86 other priests.

Readers, please spread the word about *Spotlight* through FaceBook and other mass media outlets. Encourage your family and friends to watch the film. Let's be informed!