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## Law defends his response in clergy sex abuse case

BYLINE: By Michael Paulson, Globe Staff

**BODY:**

Cardinal Bernard F. Law, stung by the suggestion that he had reassigned a priest from parish to parish despite knowing that the priest was an accused child molester, is publicly defending his conduct for the first time, and his lawyer is lashing out at the attorney for the alleged victims.

Law, in a column in today's edition of the archdiocesan newspaper, wrote, "Never was there an effort on my part to shift a problem from one place to the next."

And Law's lawyer, in a letter also published in The Pilot, blasted the attorney for the alleged victims of the Rev. John Geoghan for what he called "an extraordinary example of disingenuousness" and "an irresponsible misrepresentation of the underlying facts."

The public defense marks a tactical shift for the cardinal and his attorney, Wilson D. Rogers Jr. Law has generally avoided comment on specific cases of clergy sexual abuse, and Rogers says his letter in today's Pilot is his first comment on a pending case in 35 years.

But the Geoghan case involves more possible victims than any other case to unfold during Law's 17 years as archbishop of Boston. It also is the most potentially damaging to Law because of the allegation by the victims' attorney that the cardinal continued to place Geoghan in jobs with access to children for 11 years after being notified that the priest was an alleged child molester.

Law has admitted, in a court document filed last month, that he was notified of allegations that Geoghan had molested seven boys in September 1984, six months after Law had become archbishop of Boston.

Geoghan allegedly molested at least 70 youngsters between 1962 and 1995, while a priest at six parishes: Blessed Sacrament in Saugus, Saint Paul in Hingham, Saint Andrew the Apostle in Forest Hills, Saint Brendan in Dorchester, Saint Bernard in Concord, and Saint Julia in Weston.

Geoghan, who was defrocked in 1998 at Law's urging, has pleaded not guilty to criminal charges of child rape and indecent assault and battery. He is scheduled to go on trial in September in Suffolk Superior Court.

Rogers used his letter in The Pilot to criticize Mitchell Garabedian, the lawyer who represents 86 people who, in civil suits, charge they have been victimized by Geoghan. Seventy of Garabedian's clients say they have been abused by Geoghan; the remainder are family members of alleged victims.

"Mr. Garabedian, for all of his quoted comments in the media, has never once mentioned that each assignment of John Geoghan, subsequent to the first complaint of sexual misconduct, was incident to an independent medical evaluation advising that such assignment was appropriate and safe," Rogers wrote in his letter, which is published on the front page of The Pilot, and which was also sent to the editors of The Boston Globe and Boston Herald. "To suggest or infer that Cardinal Law assigned John Geoghan without regard for the safety of those to whom John Geoghan would minister, in my opinion, constitutes an irresponsible misrepresentation of the underlying facts."

Rogers also took umbrage at Garabedian's calling reporters' attention to a section of a legal filing in which Law said that Geoghan's alleged victims were "not in exercise of due care" and that their "negligence . . . contributed to cause the injury or damage complained of."

Rogers said such language "is standard, indeed universal practice" in civil lawsuits about negligence, and that the language is necessary in any formal response to any negligence suit to protect a defendant's rights at trial.

"While it is readily understandable how a nonlawyer could look at such a formal answer in response to a complaint and conclude that the church is blaming the alleged victim, for a lawyer to do so is, in my opinion, an extraordinary example of disingenuousness," Rogers wrote.

In an interview yesterday, Garabedian was unapologetic, saying that if Rogers didn't want Law to appear to be blaming victims, he didn't need to include such language in Law's legal filings.

As for Rogers's contention that Garabedian misrepresented the facts by suggesting that Law had knowingly exposed children to an alleged child molester, Garabedian said, "Suffice it to say that we believe that at judicial hearings we will be able to demonstrate that Father Geoghan and Father Geoghan's supervisors engaged in conduct the law considers wrong."

"Attorney Rogers seems to forget that it was Cardinal Law's own admissions in the public record which recently drew attention to these 86 lawsuits," Garabedian said. "Unfortunately, his response to the public reaction is to try to blame me, the attorney representing victims of sexual abuse."

Law's column does not refer to Geoghan by name, but offers a broad defense of the way the archdiocese handles cases of clergy sexual abuse.

"The sexual abuse of minors by priests is one of the most painful problems facing the contemporary Church," Law wrote. "Not only is the trust that should exist between a priest and child broken, but families and friends are also shaken in their own trust. Indeed, it is not unusual that questions should be raised about the way in which the Church handles such cases."

Law wrote that in 1993 he instituted a new policy for dealing with accused child molesters that attempts to provide support for victims and treatment of perpetrators, and that "ensures that there be no assignment [of clergy who have abused children] in which minors would be placed at risk."

"I only wish that the know ledge that we have today had been available to us earlier," he wrote. "It is fair to say, however, that society has been on a learning curve with regard to the sexual abuse of minors. The Church, too, has been on a learning curve. We have learned, and we will continue to learn."

Law said "nothing else has given me the anguish that I experience because of these cases."

"In the final analysis, after we have done all that we can humanly do to ensure that persons who are a threat to children are isolated from them, and after we have done all that we can do to bring some measure of healing psychologically and emotionally to all who have been traumatized by the sexual abuse of minors, it is only the peace which is the gift of the Risen Lord that can quiet our hearts and minds," he wrote.

Michael Paulson can be reached by e-mail at [mpaulson@globe.com](mailto:mpaulson@globe.com).

**GRAPHIC:** PHOTO, CARDINAL BERNARD F. LAW "Painful" problem for church

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