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STATEMENT OF BISHOP ROBERT BRENNAN IN RESPONSE TO THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

The article in today's Columbus Dispatch mischaracterizes what I said about clergy abuse in the Diocese of Rockville Centre and as a result creates a controversy where there is none. I make this statement to set the record straight.

First, let me restate what I have said many times. The sexual abuse of children is both a crime and a grave sin. I believe that such abuse is even worse when it is committed by clerics. There can be no excuse for it. That it ever occurred in the first place is a disgrace. I will not tolerate either abuse or the cover-up of abuse. I will also continue the practice of the Diocese of Columbus (which is also the policy of the Diocese of Rockville Centre and most American dioceses) of requiring that all claims of abuse be reported expeditiously to the appropriate law enforcement authorities and the removal of all clerics from ministry who are guilty of having abused a minor.

Second, I did not say that I was unaware of abuse in the Diocese of Rockville Centre. Any such statement would have been ridiculous on its face. In the early 2000's there was a published grand jury report on such abuse, and in 2017 the Diocese of Rockville Centre launched an independent reconciliation and compensation plan that was widely advertised and which I, of course, knew was occurring.

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During the press conference, when I stated that, “I have not personally been involved in it,” I was referring to the fact that while I was Vicar General and an auxiliary Bishop in the Diocese of Rockville Centre I was not personally responsible for the processing of allegations of abuse. In Rockville Centre, unlike the Diocese of Columbus, the Vicar General is not the Victims Assistance Coordinator, nor does the Vicar General make decisions relating to how claims of abuse are processed or investigated.

I did not say that I didn't meet with some victims. I did meet with some victims or family members of victims, including Mr. O'Brien, who is quoted in the article. My goal in such meetings was always to listen with compassion and to make sure that the victim was connected with the appropriate offices to ensure that all proper procedures were being followed.

As a priest, it both breaks my heart and infuriates me that a fellow priest could have abused a child. That is why I firmly support the significant changes that were made in our seminaries to weed out possible abusers and the zero-tolerance policies that were put into place throughout the United States in 2002. Those policies have been proven to work and the Diocese of Columbus will continue to be in the forefront improving and building upon them to make sure that our facilities are what they always should have been—a safe place for children.

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