

Political Scene: R.I. lawmaker details torment of her sister's molestation

By Katherine Gregg

Journal Political Writer

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Rep. Carol Hagan McEntee has written an account of what the repeated sexual molestation of her older sister, Ann, by their parish priest in West Warwick over a period of time that began in 1957, when Ann was 5 years old, did to their deeply Catholic family.

PROVIDENCE — “I want to explain and paint for you a picture of my family and how this injustice rocked us to the very core.”

So begins Rhode Island lawmaker **Carol Hagan McEntee**'s account of what the repeated sexual molestation of her older sister, Ann, by their parish priest in West Warwick over a period of time that began in 1957, when Ann was 5 years old, did to their deeply Catholic family.

McEntee stayed up most of the night, one recent night, writing it out, so she'd know what she wanted to say at the public hearing the House Judiciary Committee is holding on Tuesday, Feb. 26 on her bill to give the victims of childhood sex abuse more time than current law allows them to file civil suits against their abusers.

Her now 66-year-old sister, **Ann Hagan Webb**, a psychologist, was one of several victims of priests and other trusted elders, including staff members at the elite St. George's School in Middletown, who told their stories to the state's lawmakers last year. Ann has told The Journal she plans to tell her story again next week.

This is a shortened version of what Carol McEntee, a three-term member of the R.I. House of Representatives, wrote:

“When I filed this bill last session I knew that there were many victims in RI who were suffering, some silently. Never did I imagine that the world would explode as it did this past summer and which continues to shock us daily with story after story in state after state of the systematic abuse of children that has occurred within the Catholic Church.

“The mere fact that those in charge knew that the abuse of children was happening under their supervision and did nothing to prevent it and in many cases covered it up should shock and enrage all of us.”

“This is my personal story from a sister's perspective.”

Her story begins here:

“My parents were ‘good Catholics.’ They took us to church every Sunday and sent my sister, my brother and myself to Sacred Heart School in West Warwick from Kindergarten through 8th grade. They were both very involved in the church functions ... My grandfather was very friendly with our parish priest **Monsignor Anthony DeAngelis**. In fact I can recall that he would dine with us on occasions at our home.”

“My earliest memories of my sister ... Ann ... was that she was a beautiful, light hearted and happy little girl.... Somehow all of that changed once she went to Sacred Heart School..... She became quiet and introverted ... She seemed to get sick more often and stay home from school. I can only guess now that it was her way of taking herself out of her horrific reality.”

“In my eyes [then], she was very nearly perfect. We also thought that the Monsignor had a direct line to God. He seemed so important and so godlike. Who could have imagined that he was so evil?”

More memories

“I recall going to the rectory after school, which was right next-door, on a regular basis to retrieve my sister to go home with me. Never did I have any idea what was really happening to her,” McEntee wrote.

“It wasn’t until many years later that my sister was able to come to grips with the abuse that she had endured as a child at the hands of Monsignor Anthony DeAngelis. I will never forget the night she told me... She described vividly years of sexual abuse that was committed on her from the age of 5 to 12 years at his hands. The details are horrific and that is up to her to describe them if she feels so compelled.”

“I could not believe that the very man we were taught to respect and hold in such high esteem was her perpetrator,” McEntee wrote. “I was filled with disbelief and denial.”

“She then told my sister Amy and I that she wanted to tell our parents... She [told] us that she couldn’t tell them when she was young because he [Monsignor DeAngelis] told her that this was their secret between them and God. She said she needed to tell them as part of her recovery.”

“They reacted with anger, disbelief, denial and then guilt that they did not save her from these acts of horror. In the end I believe that they never forgave themselves for not protecting her but they felt rage at the priest and institution that they so wholeheartedly believed in, did this to their little girl.”

“The road to recovery, which took years of therapy, was very difficult for my sister. She became very skinny.”

“Many years later, my sister and myself, as her attorney, went to the Diocese of Providence and met with [**Robert** **McCarthy**]. Monsignor DeAngelis was dead and we were told that there wasn’t much we could expect from the church. We asked for records of other victims. We were denied. We received no understanding or compassion, not

even an apology from the church.” (McCarthy was the retired Massachusetts State Police lieutenant who served as director of the Diocesan Office of Education and Compliance from 1993 to his retirement in 2015.)

“They insisted that her statute of limitations had run. We settled on a nominal amount of money” — an initial \$12,500 — “to pay for some of her therapy costs,” McEntee wrote. “They were aware of problems with Monsignor DeAngelis and yet they did nothing to protect my sister from him.”

“In the end we were able to survive this... [But] I ask you now to put yourself in my shoes and imagine for a moment that she is your sister, brother, daughter, son, mother, father or friend. How would you feel?”

Wrapping up, McEntee wrote: “It is high time to pass this legislation that will extend the statute of limitations for childhood sexual abuse [from seven] to 35 years ... Give these RI victims the time they need to come to grips with what has happened to them and receive their day in court.”

McEntee’s bill to extend the time limit to 35 years has 58 co-sponsors in the 75-member House.

Diocese response

Last Friday, **Kevin O’Brien** responded on behalf of the Diocese of Providence to the Journal inquiries about what happened to Ann Hagan Webb.

“In my role as the director of the Diocesan Office of Compliance it is my responsibility to meet with people to discuss allegations of abuse and work with them to seek justice and healing. Although a diocesan office, we conduct all investigations with objectivity and independence from any influence. While I was not in my current role at the time of the events you describe, I have taken the time to thoroughly review the records in our office regarding Ms. Webb,” he wrote.

“In February, 1994, Ms. Webb contacted our office to allege that she was abused by Monsignor Anthony DeAngelis in 1957. Monsignor DeAngelis died in 1990 and could not be interviewed or offer any defense against the charges. Ms. Webb’s claims were investigated, but could not be verified or substantiated as no corroborating witnesses or facts could be found after an in-depth review.

“Ms. Webb’s claim is the only allegation made against Monsignor DeAngelis either before or after his death,” he said.

Over time, O’Brien said: “Ms. Webb was reimbursed \$51,455 for counseling through the Diocesan Office of Outreach and Prevention which provides pastoral and counseling support services.”

Asked where the diocese stands on the latest version of McEntee’s bill, the **Rev. Bernard Healey**, the chief lobbyist for the diocese at the State House — and director of the R.I. Catholic Conference — said: “We remain committed to working within the process to achieve a solution that provides justice and healing for the victims of abuse.

“We continue our review of the proposed legislation,” he said, “in pursuit of a legally sound approach that serves the common good.”

The response?

Ann Hagan Webb acknowledges “the Diocese reimbursed me for my out of pocket expenses [in] the amount of \$12,500 on 4/4/1996. This was to cover my co pays for therapy, medication etc. from 1991 to 1996, plus the estimated copay cost of one additional year of therapy. Sometime after I became involved as an advocate in 2002 I called the office of Education and Compliance and asked if they would pay for my therapy, thinking it was a long shot, but worth a try.”

The diocese “agreed, saying my therapist ... should bill them directly. I have no idea what the total was that they paid her ... I never saw the money since she received it directly for her services.”

Of the church now saying it conducted an “in depth review,” she says: “They never contacted my parents ... my therapist” — or a priest she believed could help corroborate her story — “when they were supposedly investigating, like they told me they would.”

Of her younger sister Carol’s own tearful recollections of what happened to her, Ann told The Journal: “There is so much collateral damage with this kind of trauma.”