



# Diocese of Springfield

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Bishop creates an independent task force on the response to sexual abuse within the Diocese of Springfield**

**SPRINGFIELD** - Bishop Mitchell T. Rozanski, bishop of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Springfield, has today announced the creation of a 10-person special Independent Task Force on the Response to Sexual Abuse within the Diocese of Springfield.

The task force will be chaired by retired Massachusetts Superior Court Judge Daniel Ford and vice-chaired by Irene Woods, founding executive director of the Children’s Advocacy Center of Franklin County and the North Quabbin. The other members include Orlando Isaza, Ronald Johnson, Rev. Michael Pierz, Sister of St. Joseph Mary Quinn, James Stankiewicz, Joan Tabachnick, Rev. William Tourigny, and Amber Zinni. In addition, Maurice Boisvert of Shrewsbury, Mass., a licensed independent clinical social worker, will serve as a planning consultant to the task force (brief bios attached).

Jeffrey Trant, director of the diocesan Office of Safe Environment and Victim Assistance, will serve as senior staff to the group.

In making this decision Bishop Rozanski said, “I am uniquely aware that despite past efforts, our diocese has not always provided a meaningful nor pastoral response to victims of abuse so I am looking to this task force, which is made up of a diverse group of distinguished individuals with a tremendous scope of experience, to help us develop a strategic plan to improve our policies and procedures. We owe all who we have failed to protect in the past a meaningful and transparent response to their important voice; we want to provide them with continuing support and healing while ensuring there is full accountability for any abuse; and we hope to ensure a caring and safe faith community for all in the future.”

Bishop Rozanski said he appreciates the leadership of Judge Ford and Ms. Woods, and the work of the task force members as well as everyone who will contribute to this process.

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The task force has already started their work and has developed the following mission statement:

*“Our mission will be informed by the report issued by Judge Peter A. Velis (ret.) regarding the Diocese of Springfield’s handling of allegations of sexual abuse by the late Bishop Christopher J. Weldon as well as direct feedback from other abuse survivors and family members. The task force will advise the Bishop of Springfield with specific steps for improvement in the following areas: (1) acknowledging the trauma of sexual abuse on members of our community and ensuring the allocation of resources needed to promote healing of survivors; (2) responding to all allegations of sexual abuse in our church community in a timely, compassionate and fair way; (3) ensuring the diocese has a transparent system of protocols and procedures that guarantee respect and due process for all involved; (4) ensuring that local church leadership is held responsible and accountable for failing to protect children and other vulnerable persons; (5) holding those who have been credibly accused of sexual abuse responsible and accountable; and (6) preventing sexual abuse of anyone in our faith communities in the future.”*

Judge Ford said, “We are all humbled to take on this ambitious agenda. While the Judge Velis Report will be a critical starting point, it is clearly not the end. We intend to gather information from all stakeholders, including survivors of sexual abuse, and to base our ultimate report on additional data, the Velis Report, and best practices. We are setting no time deadlines and we will take whatever time we need to be thorough and comprehensive. At the same time, recognizing the importance of this endeavor, we will work as quickly and expeditiously as humanly possible. Recommended changes, however, will not wait for the strategic plan report. They will be forwarded to the bishop for immediate implementation as they are developed. We will make our report public when it is finished and we will brief the members of the press on the matters set forth in it. We look forward to being of assistance to the bishop in significantly improving whatever protocols and procedures may currently be in existence.”

The Judge Velis Report has not yet been delivered to the diocese but is expected in the near future, at which time it will be released in its entirety to the public.

The naming of this task force is just the latest action undertaken by the diocese to improve its safe environment efforts. In June 2019, Trant was brought on board as the director of the diocesan Office of Safe Environment and Victim Assistance. Under his leadership, the diocese has commissioned the Judge Peter Velis investigation, brought on a new team of investigators and, earlier this month, signed onto a joint memorandum of understanding with the three district attorneys’ offices whose jurisdictions cover all of western Massachusetts and the Diocese of Springfield.