

Victims' group refuses to turn over names in abuse suit

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ST. LOUIS (RNS) The director of a leading victims' advocacy group refused to answer some questions or turn over documents in a deposition held Monday (Jan. 2) in a Kansas City, Mo., clergy abuse case.

David Clohessy, who directs the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests (SNAP) from St. Louis, said in a statement that attorneys for an accused Kansas City priest had requested "hundreds or thousands of pages of SNAP records involving victims and others across the country going back some 23 years."

Several courts, including the Missouri Supreme Court, had rejected Clohessy's request to quash the deposition subpoena. Clohessy's lawyers argued that forcing Clohessy to testify could result in disclosing confidential information from victims of clergy sexual abuse, members of the organization and journalists.

But after the state supreme court declined to intervene, Clohessy was forced to testify, even as he refused to turn over certain documents.

In a statement, SNAP called the subpoena "an unprecedented, bullying maneuver designed to protect child molesters and silence victims" and "a new low in church hardball tactics."

Attorneys who work with abuse victims said compelling such testimony would betray

the trust of abuse victims and introduce a chilling effect for those who have yet to come forward.

"It would severely damage SNAP's ability to provide support for victims if victims aren't able to come forward to speak in confidence," said Ken Chackes, an attorney not involved in the case whose firm represents plaintiffs in most clergy sexual abuse cases in St. Louis.

Clohessy was drawn into the case after attorneys for the Kansas City priest, the Rev. Michael Tierney, accused the alleged victim's lawyers of violating a gag order by providing Clohessy information that he then released to the news media in a press release.

Clohessy's attorney had promised that, if forced to testify, he would withhold details about abuse victims his organization has worked with.

"We will refuse to provide the information we believe is confidential," said SNAP attorney Jeffrey Jensen. "We will refuse to provide any information that would identify victims of sexual abuse, or that identifies SNAP members or supporters, in order to protect their confidentiality."

The Missouri Press Association joined the move to quash the subpoena, on the grounds that it could force Clohessy's organization to reveal previously confidential correspondence with journalists.

"The Press Association believes the judge's order is overly broad ... and will interfere with reporters' First Amendment right to gather information for news stories," said Jean Maneke, and attorney for the press association.

Tierney's attorney, Brian Madden, could not be reached for comment.

Tierney is accused of molesting a 13-year-old Missouri boy in 1971. Kansas City-St. Joseph Bishop Robert Finn removed Tierney from active ministry last June after a diocesan review board found the allegations against the priest credible.