

\$250,000 bail set for Philadelphia's Monsignor William Lynn

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(RNS) The Philadelphia priest whose conviction for failing to report child-abusing clerics to authorities was overturned last week was granted a \$250,000 bail on Monday (Dec. 30). But it could take at least another week before Monsignor William Lynn is free.

Common Pleas Court Judge M. Teresa Sarmina also ruled that Lynn, who has already spent 18 months of his three-to-six-year sentence behind bars, must surrender his passport and be subject to electronic monitoring and weekly reporting while on bail.

The Philadelphia district attorney's office had requested that Lynn, 62, remain in jail while prosecutors appealed the reversal of his conviction.

Lynn's June 2012 conviction on one count of child endangerment was seen as a milestone because it was the first time anyone in the upper levels of the Catholic Church had ever faced a trial or been found guilty for shielding molesters.

Lynn was responsible for clergy personnel and fielded abuse complaints for the Archdiocese of Philadelphia from 1992 to 2004. His lawyers said that in covering up for molesters he was following the orders and policies of his superiors, primarily the late Cardinal Anthony Bevilacqua, who died in January 2012 before Lynn's three-month trial began.

But a three-judge Superior Court panel on Dec. 26 unanimously ruled that while Lynn had "prioritized the archdiocese's reputation over the safety of potential victims of sexually abusive priests" his actions did not violate the child welfare law in place at the time.

During Monday's hearing, which Lynn did not attend, Sarmina said she had been struggling with whether to grant Lynn bail or not. But she said the Superior Court's ruling tipped the scales toward allowing bail.

"I am, in fact, fallible," she said, according to The Philadelphia Inquirer. "If the conviction is in question, is not the punishment in question?"

The mandatory reporting law that Lynn was originally charged under was amended in 2007 to explicitly cover supervisors like Lynn, but that came years after he had left his position.