

January 10, 2023

Republican Caucus:

My name is Susan Vance. I belong to SNAP of Tennessee (Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests).

Why does your President of the Senate and Lieutenant Governor Randy McNally, a Catholic parishioner of St. Mary's Oak Ridge, want to taint the legislature with the presence of his friend and religious/spiritual advisor? In East Tennessee, we call Bishop Stika the "Cover-up Bishop." This is what the Catholics of East Tennessee know. (<https://www.change.org/p/we-deserve-better-diocese-of-knoxville>).

It has come to my attention that Bishop Richard Stika will be giving the opening prayer at the beginning of the state Senate legislative session. Bishop Stika is currently involved in federal and state civil lawsuits that involve the cover-up of sex abuse. One of the priests that he has covered up for will face a criminal trial for sex abuse in mid-February. Stika is also involved in allegations of financial mismanagement that include misuse of PPP distributions and improperly taking funds from a non-profit.

This has led Catholics in East Tennessee to sign multiple petitions calling for the resignation of Bishop Stika. The Bishop has recently gone through an investigation from the Vatican itself. Having Bishop Stika give this prayer is nothing but a PR stunt by McNally and the Catholic hierarchy of the Knoxville diocese, and I fear that it would cause Tennesseans to believe their legislators are complicit in his cover-ups.

I am sure that you can remember in 2021 the unanimous decision by you and your colleagues to make sexual abuse by clergy members a class E felony. Bishop Stika's current situation is an affront to the entire legislature and the will of the people. Bishop Stika's actions have resulted in extensive media attention both national and local. Here are a few links to refresh your memory:

<https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/ex-church-worker-tennessee-claims-lawsuit-was-raped-seminarian-rcna17469>

<https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/widow-says-was-groped-catholic-priest-grief-counseling-session-rcna57311>

<https://www.change.org/p/we-deserve-better-diocese-of-knoxville>

<https://www.pillaratholic.com/knoxville-diocese-fought-to-name/>

<https://www.knoxnews.com/story/news/local/2022/11/22/knoxville-catholic-diocese-lawyer-held-conflicting-roles-in-priest-sex-abuse-case/69658374007/>

I look forward to our continuing dialogue on these issues that are very important to us and very important to the people of our state. Please contact me if you have any questions.

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