

Accused bishop gets deal to avoid second indictment

by [Daniel Burke](#) in the [December 13, 2011](#) issue

A Catholic bishop in Missouri has avoided a second criminal charge for failing to report suspected child abuse by agreeing to allow prosecutors to oversee similar allegations against church officials in their county for the next five years.

Bishop Robert Finn of the Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph will not face prosecution in Clay County on the misdemeanor charge if he fulfills the agreement.

The deal allows the Clay County prosecutors to review the diocese's handling of every accusation of child abuse in their jurisdiction for the next five years.

The agreement does not affect Finn's fate in neighboring Jackson County, where he was indicted for failing to report suspected child abuse in October.

Finn is the highest-ranking Catholic official in the U.S. to face criminal charges for not telling law enforcement that a priest under his supervision had been accused of child sexual abuse. The charges stem from Finn's admission that he knew that a priest in his diocese had hundreds of images of alleged child pornography on his computer but did not tell the police for five months.

To avoid prosecution in Clay County, Finn is required to report monthly to Prosecuting Attorney Daniel White for the next five years and "apprise him of any and all reported suspicious or alleged abuse activities involving minors."

"This will be a learning experience for the bishop," White said in a statement. "The diocese and the bishop acknowledge past reporting systems had flaws; injecting an outsider into the mix—an outsider who can trigger a criminal investigation and file charges—gives parents and children in our community confidence that if anything were to happen, it will be promptly and effectively addressed."

Finn also agreed to visit all Clay County parishes and outline the notification programs that his diocese is implementing to protect minors. "This agreement

provides a structure for us to maintain an open dialogue about any and all issues of abuse of minors within Catholic parishes and institutions in Clay County," Finn said in a statement November 15.

Advocates for victims of clergy sexual abuse criticized the deal. "The truth surfaces in court," said Peter Isley of the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests. "That's what bishops work overtime to avoid. And that's what Finn has achieved here." —RNS