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8 September 1998

The Attorney General
The Honorable Matt Foley
Parliament House
Brisbane Q 4000

Dear Sir

I wish to draw to your attention a matter that has been before the court in Rockhampton for quite a long time now. My name is AYB [redacted] and I am one of the people who have charged a priest in connection with St. Joseph's Orphanage. I was not a resident of the home, however I did work there for some months in 1965, and know several of the people involved.

This priest has been part of our family for 40 years and has always been like my Mother's brother. My parents treated him with great respect and he has performed all the weddings and christenings and been a part of all our family celebrations including Christmas and Birthdays.

I was sexually abused by this man for 7 years and was encouraged to keep it quiet. I kept this secret hidden from my family until Bishop Brian Heenan accused the people of Neerkol of telling "scurrilous lies and slanderous statements". I could not sit back and be silent knowing what I did and could not understand the Bishop making such a statement especially as I had named the priest to him on the 10th February 1994. In June 1982 I named the priest to Francis Rush who was then the Archbishop of Brisbane. I had also named the priest to the Family Services Dept. around the same time.

When I went forward to the police I was told my anonymity would be respected at all times. Sadly, my brother was shown on television walking into court. He is very well known in the Rockhampton District. From what was written about the case in the media my Grade 6 teacher recognized me. Friends I went to school with also contacted me. This was a most stressful time.

This man was committed for trial on the 18th September 1997. Since January this year the case has gone up for mention each month. On 24th July a Stay of Proceedings was applied for and the Judge delayed his decision for 2 weeks. We have waited and waited. Last Friday 4th September, we were informed he would hand down his decision on 18th September some 8 weeks after it went to court, and it will be exactly one year since he was committed for trial. This delay has nearly sent us all over the edge. How could a

decision take this long to make? The investigation into Neerkol commenced on 13th September 1996. The priest turned 83 on 31st August.

When I went forward I believed I was doing the right thing. I felt it would be so wrong of me to sit back and be silent. The priest was eventually charged with 22 counts of indecent dealing and 2 of rape. Now that has been cut down to 6 charges of indecent dealing – hardly worth all the pain and suffering.

After I disclosed to my family my parents were devastated. Why didn't I tell them? My mother has since had a Radical Mastectomy, my father has suffered severe heart failure, one sister has had Bells Palsy (similar to a stroke) and my other brothers and sisters are full of anger, rage and resentment. Archbishop Rush ignored me at a funeral and when I challenged him by letter his solicitor wrote to me and told me not to bother him again. My own family has had to stand by and watch me dissolve into tears on many occasions when I have found it impossible to cope.

The Bishop of Rockhampton has apologized to the people of Neerkol and the Sisters of Mercy have apologized but so far no one has apologized to me. I really feel that I am out on a limb. The inquiry set up by Anna Bligh is only for people in Institutions and doesn't involve me although it was the same priest.

Sadly, I am wondering where is the Justice in all this horrible mess. Last Friday when I called your office, 2 people there that I spoke to have never heard of Neerkol so I am left wondering if I am making a mountain out of a molehill. I am grateful Peter Clarke eventually phoned me back and I apologize for bothering you but from my position I believe there is no justice for the victim only the perpetrator of these heinous crimes.

In your position I am asking you to please look into why a town the size of Rockhampton has only one judge? Why do cases such as this have to take so long? The trauma of this long delay is sometimes unbearable and I worry that some of us may not be here when it finally gets to court. Why is there not a support person for the Rockhampton area? - - Mel Shelley is not Superwoman.

I would be grateful if you would look into this matter for me and reply at your earliest convenience.

Yours truly,

AYB

Phone/Fax REDACTED