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Roman Catholic Diocese of Oakland Bishop Michael Barber, center, listens to a presentation alongside fellow bishops at the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' annual fall meeting in Baltimore, Nov. 12, 2013. (AP Photo/Patrick Semansky, File)

by Associated Press

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The Roman Catholic Diocese of Oakland filed for bankruptcy on May 8 due to hundreds of new child sex abuse claims, becoming the second diocese in California to do so.

The San Francisco Bay Area diocese faces more than 330 lawsuits brought under a California law allowing claims that would have otherwise expired, Bishop Michael Barber said in a letter posted to the diocese's website.

Most of them allege abuse that dates back to the 1980s and earlier, according to Barber, and by priests who are no longer active in ministry or deceased. He said a Chapter 11 bankruptcy reorganization would ensure "a fair and equitable outcome for survivors" and allow the church to continue its work.

SNAP, a survivors' network for clergy sex abuse victims, criticized the bankruptcy filing, calling it a ploy to keep information hidden. In a statement, it said the Oakland diocese could sell off property to compensate victims.

"The Diocese of Oakland is morally bankrupt, but they do not deserve to be declared financially bankrupt," SNAP said.

In March, the Diocese of Santa Rosa became the first in California to file for Chapter 11 protection, saying it could not pay out potential claims topping 200.

The Oakland Diocese serves about 550,000 Catholics in the East Bay region.

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