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**UNITED STATES BANKRUPTCY COURT
NORTHERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA**

In re:

THE ROMAN CATHOLIC BISHOP OF
OAKLAND, a California corporation sole,

Debtor.

Chapter 11

Bankruptcy Case No. 23-40523 WJL

Date: March 3, 2025
Time: 1:30 p.m. Pacific Time
Place: U.S. Bankruptcy Court
1300 Clay Street, Courtroom 220
Oakland, California 94612

**INSURERS' REPLY IN RESPONSE TO MEMORANDUM CONCERNING
CERTAIN ISSUES RAISED DURING JANUARY 21, 2025 HEARING ON
APPROVAL OF DISCLOSURE STATEMENT**



1 The issues set forth in the Committee’s brief and in this Insurer response are
2 disputed but, more importantly, they are hypothetical. The Committee cites no bankruptcy statute,
3 rule, or case law that would preclude the Court from approving the DS based on the potential
4 impact of the discharge. More broadly, the Committee cites no bankruptcy law stating that the
5 confirmation of any Plan must or even could be delayed for an indefinite period of years pending
6 determination of issues that fundamentally are state law issues (and unripe, to boot). A future
7 court can determine who is right based on facts that have actually occurred and evaluate whether
8 any of the California cases the Committee has cited—*Hamilton*, *Howard*, *Hand*, and others—afford
9 rights that claimants may assert. From a disclosure standpoint, the appropriate thing to do is
10 disclose the risks, even if it is not presently possible to reconcile them. The Insurers support
11 clarifying and augmenting the disclosure language to identify and explain the risks to Abuse
12 Claimants. Then the Plan should be sent out for balloting so Abuse Claimants can vote on it.

13 The dispute raised by the Committee over purported bad-faith “rights” supposedly
14 held by Abuse Claimants against the Insurers is not one that is ripe for resolution by this Court.
15 The “rights,” which are themselves disputed, are entirely contingent: they depend on both the
16 development of future facts that may never come to pass and the resolution of legal issues whose
17 outcome is uncertain. As with any similar dispute arising in connection with a proposed plan—
18 such as, whether litigation claims have value and, if so, how much, and who will decide the dispute
19 and when—all that can be done is to disclose the risks to those voting on the Plan. That is precisely
20 what should be done here: the disclosure statement should disclose the existence of the dispute,
21 describe the dispute in fair and accurate terms, and allow voters the opportunity to vote for or
22 against the Plan based on their personal assessment of the disclosed risks.

23 Bad faith claims arise out of specific conduct that breaches a duty. Without either
24 the conduct or the duty, there is no claim. Everyone appears to agree on that simple proposition.
25 Everyone also agrees that, at present, there has been no conduct by any of the Insurers that
26 breached a duty to Debtor. What conduct could occur in the future, and what corresponding duty
27 might exist and be breached, is not something that can be determined now. Under Debtor’s Plan,
28 its insurance rights would be assigned to the Survivor Trust without alteration so that the Trust

1 and the Abuse Claimants can make future arguments—no doubt including as to bad faith—based
2 on future developments in post-confirmation litigation of Abuse Claims. But without any existing
3 bad faith claims, no such arguments can be made now, much less adjudicated by this Court.

4 The Committee identifies rights it suggests exist now and may be eliminated under
5 the Plan, but the Committee is wrong because the rights it identifies are not based on duties owed
6 to the Abuse Claimants. With one limited exception for judgment creditors based on *Hand v.*
7 *Farmers Insurance Exchange*, which has no application here, California law holds that an insurer's
8 duties under insurance policies run to the insured, not to third-party claimants. Thus, whatever
9 effect the Plan has, it cannot eliminate rights the Abuse Claimants do not have in the first place.
10 Nevertheless, Debtor is proposing revisions to the Plan and DS to clarify that the right identified
11 in *Hand* would be unaffected by the Plan. The Insurers support these revisions.¹

12 Argument

13 I. The Debtor's disclosure statement provides sufficient disclosure.

14 The Committee has described what it contends are valuable rights. If such rights
15 actually exist and could be asserted by the Abuse Claimants, it is possible a confirmed plan that
16 discharges Debtor from liability could alter them. To the extent such a result ensues, it would be
17 by operation of the Bankruptcy Code.² Either way, it is not the place of a bankruptcy court to say
18 what the future effect of confirmation might be.³

19 The Committee cites no law supporting its implicit argument that the discharge
20 should not apply, or that its application or enforcement should be delayed, in order to avoid a

21
22 ¹ The Insurers reserve all rights to argue in post-confirmation litigation that the rights and
23 duties identified by the Committee are based on an incorrect statement of California law, including
24 that *Hand v. Farmers Ins. Exch.*, 23 Cal. App.4th 1847 (1994), is not good law and/or should not be
25 approved by the California Supreme Court.

26 ² See *In re Congoleum Corp.*, 2008 WL 4186899, at *9 (Bankr. D.N.J. Sept. 2, 2008) (“While the
27 Bankruptcy Code is not a license to trample on all non-debtors’ rights, instances are legion in which
28 ‘distinct and valuable’ rights of non-debtors are lost or redefined in a bankruptcy case. . . . Congress
through the Bankruptcy Code has ‘reshaped debtor and creditor rights in marked departure from
state law.’”), quoting *Associates Commercial Corp. v. Rash*, 520 U.S. 953, 964 (1997).

³ *In re Boy Scouts of Am. & Delaware BSA, LLC*, 642 B.R. 504, 632 (Bankr. D. Del. 2022) (“What
insurers are obligated to pay under their policies is an insurance coverage issue that is not before the
court.”), *supplemented*, 2022 WL 20541782 (Bankr. D. Del. Sept. 8, 2022), *aff'd*, 650 B.R. 87 (D. Del.
2023), and 650 B.R. 87 (D. Del. 2023).

1 possible effect on hypothetical future bad faith “rights.” Simply put, there is no statutory authority
2 to “delay” the discharge and the Committee does not point to any. However, the possible effect
3 itself is an issue readily addressed with disclosure of the risks to the Abuse Claimants.

4 In other diocesan bankruptcies, plans of reorganization propose to assign insurance
5 rights to a trust. Insurers have argued in those cases that there may not be coverage for various
6 reasons, which would obviously have a substantial impact on the ability of claimants in those cases
7 to recover. Disclosure statements in these and other cases featuring similar insurance disputes
8 have been routinely approved with a discussion of risk factors providing little more information
9 than the following disclosure from the *Diocese of Rochester* case, which discloses to claimants that
10 they may not receive anything from litigation with one of the insurers:

11 The Plan provides for the assignment to the Trust of Insurance Claims against Non-
12 Settling Insurers. CNA, as the sole Non-Settling Insurer, is likely to assert factual and
13 legal defenses to both their coverage obligations and to the underlying liability of the
14 Diocese and other Participating Parties for Abuse Claims. Litigation of the Insurance
15 Claims against CNA could take years and may require the Trust to expend several
16 million dollars in litigation costs. Litigation Claimants who pursue Litigation Claims
17 will also do so at their own expense. There is no guarantee that any Litigation Claimant
18 will succeed in establishing liability of the Diocese or any Participating Party, that the
19 Trust will prevail in its prosecution of Insurance Claims against Non-Settling Insurers,
20 or that such recovery, if any, will exceed the amounts that would otherwise be available
21 from CNA pursuant to the CNA Second Settlement Agreement or the CNA
22 Competing Plan.

23 CNA has asserted that it has defenses that could impair coverage and the Trust’s ability
24 to recover anything on account of the Insurance Claims. For a discussion of CNA’s
25 alleged defenses, please refer to the CNA Disclosure Statement. In the event CNA
26 successfully defends against the Insurance Claims, the DOR Entities’ Cash
27 Contribution and the settlement payments from Settling Insurers would be the sole
28 source of recovery for Abuse Claims.⁴

29 Similar disclosure can fully address the concerns here.

30 As another example, in *Diocese of Camden*, the same Lowenstein Sandler lawyers who
31 represent the Committee here obtained approval in that case for a disclosure statement that
32 addressed uncertainty over the effect of the policy assignment there by adding a straightforward
33 risk factor clause: “To the extent that such assignment is not allowed, the assets contributed to

34 ⁴ Order Approving Disclosure Statements, Dkt. No. 2602-2 at 55 of 62, *In re Diocese of Rochester*,
35 Case No. 2-19-20905-PRW (Bankr. W.D.N.Y. Apr. 29, 2024). See also Order Approving Disclosure
36 Statement, Dkt. No. 2398 at 129 of 176, *In re Diocese of Syracuse*, Case No. 20-30663 (Bankr. N.D.N.Y.
37 Dec. 23, 2024).

1 the Trust to satisfy Abuse Claims will be reduced or insurance coverage may be voided by the
2 assignment.”⁵

3 Outside of diocesan cases, in any case involving a “pot plan,” in which claimants
4 share in the proceeds of litigation claims, disclosure is typically deemed adequate if it describes the
5 potential claims, the range of possible recoveries, the defenses that might be asserted, any other
6 risks to recovery, and the timeline for the disputes to be resolved.

7 It is expected that Debtor’s amended DS will provide such disclosures. Insurers
8 anticipate that it will tell Abuse Claimants that although no bad faith claims or rights presently
9 exist, (i) the Committee claims that if reasonable, within-limits settlement demands are made on
10 behalf of Abuse Claimants who elect the Litigation Option and rejected, and judgment is eventually
11 entered in excess of policy limits, the claimants may be able to recover “bad faith” damages from
12 the insurers who rejected the demands, (ii) the Insurers dispute or may dispute that such claims
13 would exist or be recoverable, (iii) that a court presiding over a coverage claim will decide who is
14 right, and (iv) it could take years for the dispute to be resolved, following entry of judgment. That
15 is sufficient disclosure for the Disclosure Statement to be approved and for solicitation to begin.

16 **II. State insurance law will determine what future rights can be enforced and by**
17 **whom.**

18 In California, all contracts, including insurance policies, are subject to an implied
19 covenant of good faith and fair dealing. California courts have identified implied duties on the
20 part of an insurer that derive from the insurer’s contractual obligations and from the implied
21 covenant. For example, an insurer must take into account the interests of the insured and has a
22 duty to accept reasonable settlement demands that are within policy limits, in order to avoid
23 exposing its contractual counter-party, the insured, to an excess judgment.⁶ Bad faith claims arise
24 out of the specific handling of a particular claim, *e.g.*, whether there is coverage in the first place,
25 what information is available, whether a demand is reasonable and within policy limits, and other
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27 ⁵ *Diocese of Camden*, (Case No. 20-21257-JNP).

28 ⁶ *Hamilton v. Maryland Cas. Co.*, 27 Cal.4th 718, 724 (2002).

1 issues, but they do not exist in a vacuum.⁷

2 An insured may assign its claims for an insurer's breach of duty to a third-party
3 claimant to pursue, but such an assignment becomes effective only after a judgment has been
4 entered against the insured.⁸ This rule reflects the fact that such claims are not designed for the
5 benefit of third parties; rather, they are protections that arise pursuant to the insurance contract
6 and generally run only to the insured. The well-developed California case law cited by the
7 Committee is based on duties owed by the insurer *to the insured*.⁹ An insurer that breaches its
8 duty of reasonable settlement may be liable *to the insured* for *the insured's* damages proximately
9 caused by the breach.¹⁰

10 With this understanding of California law, which is unrebutted by the Committee,
11 it is plain that disclosure can be crafted to adequately inform Abuse Claimants as to the risk that,
12 if the Plan is confirmed, they may not be able to successfully assert bad faith claims against the insurers
13 for not accepting settlement demands. Disclosure statements frequently describe the risk that
14 confirmation of a Chapter 11 plan may alter previously held rights. Simply put, the risk here is that
15 a future court may have to determine the effect (if any) of the Plan on the purported "rights"
16 supposedly held by Abuse Claimants and that such future court may conclude that Abuse
17 Claimants' bad faith rights either do not exist or never existed, whether by operation of the
18 Bankruptcy Code, the Plan, California insurance law, or otherwise.¹¹ That risk can be described
19 and disclosed.

21 ⁷ *Wilson v. 21st Century Ins. Co.*, 42 Cal.4th 713, 723 (2007) ("an insurer's denial of or delay in
22 paying benefits gives rise to tort damages only if the insured shows the denial or delay was
23 unreasonable"). See also *Howard v. Am. Nat' Fire Ins. Co.*, 187 Cal. App.4th 498, 513 (2010) ("Among
the elements that must be proven is that the policy covers the relief awarded in the judgment"), citing
Garamendi v. Golden Eagle Ins. Co., 116 Cal. App.4th 694, 710 (2004).

24 ⁸ *Smith v. State Farm Mut. Auto. Ins. Co.*, 5 Cal. App.4th 1104, 1114-15 (1992).

25 ⁹ See *Murphy v. Allstate Ins. Co.*, 17 Cal.3d 937, 941 (1976).

26 ¹⁰ *Hamilton*, 27 Cal.4th at 725.

27 ¹¹ Such an effect would not, of course, vitiate obligations to defend and pay claims pursuant to
28 the policies. Debtor's Plan is premised on insurers defending claims and attempting to resolve them.
The primary insurers' policies provide that defense costs are paid in addition to policy limits, and any
policies' applicable limits could be exposed by the prospect of jury verdicts, both of which provide
insurers with ample motivation to enter into reasonable settlements, as they did in the *Clergy III*
proceeding.

1 **A. No bad faith claims presently exist under California law.**

2 For several reasons, there presently are no ripe bad faith claims or existing bad faith
3 rights under California law. As a result, this Court cannot determine what “rights” claimants may
4 have or how the Plan might affect them. Any such effort is simply premature.

5 First, Debtor’s operative complaint in the district court coverage litigation
6 affirmatively acknowledges that the Insurers have accepted the defense of every abuse lawsuit
7 against Debtor. Thus, there is no potentially actionable wrongful refusal to defend. Nor is there
8 an actionable failure to accept a reasonable, within-limits settlement offer; such a claim does not
9 exist until a judgment is entered in excess of the amount of such a demand, and there are no such
10 judgments.¹² Accordingly, there is no factual basis to support a bad faith theory—much less a
11 viable claim.

12 Second, even if—contrary to the facts—any of the Insurers had engaged in bad
13 faith conduct, a claim based on such conduct could not now be asserted by the Abuse Claimants.
14 California law is crystal clear that a judgment against the insured is necessary to maintain a cause
15 of action for bad faith against an insurer.¹³ This is because “it cannot be determined with certainty
16 whether, and in what amount, the insured has been harmed” until the judgment is final.¹⁴ Here,
17 there are no judgments.

18 Third, bad faith claims cannot be accelerated by the insured and claimant entering
19 into a settlement or stipulated judgment without the approval of the insurer, adjudication by a
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23 ¹² *Safeco Ins. Co. of Am. v. Superior Court*, 71 Cal.App.4th 782, 788 (1999) (“A cause of action for
24 bad faith refusal to settle arises only after a judgment has been rendered in excess of the policy limits.
... Until judgment is actually entered, the mere possibility or probability of an excess judgment does
not render the refusal to settle actionable.”).

25 ¹³ *Hamilton*, 27 Cal.4th at 725 (“Such an assignment may be made before trial, but the
26 assignment does not become operative, and the claimant’s action against the insurer does not mature,
until a judgment in excess of the policy limits has been entered against the insured”); *Ace Am. Ins. Co.*
27 *v. Fireman’s Fund Ins. Co.*, 2 Cal. App.5th 159, 178 (2016) (“The cause of action arises only upon entry
of a judgment in excess of policy limits”), citing *Archdale v. Am. Int’l Specialty Lines Ins. Co.*, 154
Cal.App.4th 449, 474 (2007).

28 ¹⁴ *Ace Am. Ins. Co.*, 2 Cal. App.5th at 178.

1 court, or contribution to the settlement by the insured.¹⁵ As explained in *Smith*,

2 in an action brought before judgment by the insured's assignee against the insurer, the
3 issue of the insured's liability cannot be litigated in an adversarial context, because the
4 insured may appear as an ally of the claimant. . . . [T]he assignment of bad faith claims
5 before judgment would put excess insurers at an unfair disadvantage. It costs the
6 insured nothing to assign a bad faith claim against the excess insurer. If such
7 assignments were allowed without restriction, the excess insurer would often face
8 either a second round of litigation or the necessity of filing a cross-complaint for
9 declaratory relief in the original action. The situation of the excess insurer is critical
10 since such assignments would be most likely to occur against an excess insurer. The
11 claimant would have little incentive to forego judgment or a monetary settlement from
12 the insured in exchange for such an assignment against a primary insurer.¹⁶

13 Therefore, without judgments or agreement of the Insurers, Debtor could not
14 accelerate its own liability vis-à-vis the Insurers even if it wanted to—California law protects the
15 rights of insurers too.

16 In sum, any bad faith claims are purely hypothetical at present. They do not exist
17 and cannot be assigned before entry of judgment. For the same reason, there is no *Purdue* issue
18 either: Abuse Claimants are not being asked to release rights against the Insurers—there are no
19 such rights in the first place.

20 **B. Third parties cannot assert bad faith claims that arise out of duties owed**
21 **only to the insured.**

22 Without a duty, there is no claim. Parties can only vindicate rights based on duties
23 that are owed to them. The Committee's theory of bad faith rests on a variety of potential duties
24 that could apply in the future but, in any event, are owed only to the insured and therefore do not
25 give rise to claims by third parties such as claimants. The California Supreme Court's decision in
26 *Murphy* and a line of ensuing cases hold that "the insurer's duty to settle run[s] to the insured and
27 not to the injured claimant" and "does not directly benefit the injured claimant."¹⁷

28 ¹⁵ *Smith*, 5 Cal. App. 4th at 1113. See also *Ace Am. Ins. Co. v. Fireman's Fund Ins. Co.*, 2 Cal.
App.5th at 176 ("a stipulated judgment entered into without the involvement of the insurer, coupled
with an agreement not to execute the judgment on the insured, is not reliable proof of damages for
the insurer's failure to settle within policy limits").

¹⁶ *Smith*, 5 Cal. App. 4th at 1112-13. See also *McLaughlin v. Nat'l Union Fire Ins. Co.*, 23 Cal.
App.4th 1132, 1154 (1994) ("because the covenant [not to execute] absolutely protects the insured
against personal exposure, the insured has no incentive to contest liability or damages. This dynamic
invites collusion between claimants and the insured.")

¹⁷ *Murphy*, 17 Cal.3d at 941.

1 In *Murphy*, the insurer rejected within-policy limits settlement demands and a
2 judgment was ultimately rendered in excess of limits. Following entry of judgment, the claimant
3 sued the insurer, alleging breach of the duty of good faith for the insurer's refusal to settle within
4 policy limits. Acknowledging the rule that an "insurer must settle within policy limits when there
5 is substantial likelihood of recovery in excess of those limits," the Supreme Court nevertheless
6 rejected the claimant's cause of action because "the duty to settle is intended to benefit the insured
7 and not the injured claimant."¹⁸

8 Further, there can be no breach of the duty to settle that would give rise to excess-
9 of-limits liability where the insured has "no interest, no financial stake in the outcome of the
10 litigation, and no assets which would be exposed to risk by a failure of [the insurer] to settle."¹⁹

11 These cases confirm that an insurer's duty runs only to the insured, and an insured
12 that cannot be injured by an insurer's breach cannot recover damages for bad faith. Thus, the so-
13 called *Hamilton* rights invoked by the Committee are not assertable by its constituents.²⁰

14 Separately from its arguments about claims for unreasonable failure to settle, the
15 Committee raises arguments about claims for unreasonable failure to pay judgments. No such
16 claims exist at present, because no Abuse Claimant currently holds any judgment against Debtor.
17 Notwithstanding, the Committee asserts that *Hand* gives Abuse Claimants direct rights against an
18 insurer for an unreasonable refusal to pay a judgment.²¹ The Insurers do not dispute that *Hand*

19 ¹⁸ *Id.* at 943-44.

20 ¹⁹ *Shapero v. Allstate Ins. Co.*, 14 Cal. App.3d 433, 438 (1971). *See also Fritz v. Allstate Ins. Co.*, 62
21 F.3d 1424, *2 (9th Cir. 1995) (table) (affirming dismissal of claim for bad faith failure to settle within
22 policy limits "because, under the rule of *Shapero*, none of the insured's assets were exposed to risk by
23 the denial of the settlement offer because there were no assets in [the] estate"); *Fireman's Fund v. Nat'l*
24 *Bank for Cooperatives*, 849 F. Supp. 1347, 1363 (N.D. Cal. 1994) (citing *Shapero* as "directly analogous
precedent" and finding no bad faith for failure to defend where the insured was a dissolved corporation,
a bankruptcy court had entered an injunction barring any collection from assets of the insured, and the
insured therefore "could not have been harmed in any way by the arbitration proceedings and its
resulting judgment").

25 ²⁰ *Howard*, cited by the Committee, does not support its arguments. There, an insurer was found
26 to have breached its obligation to accept a reasonable settlement offer in the underlying case and the
insured was forced to pay its own settlement and pursue insurance. The insured then pursued a bad
faith claim against the insurer and prevailed. Such an outcome is entirely consistent with the duty an
insurer owes to an insured. *Howard* does not involve underlying claimants pursuing bad faith claims
against an insurer.

28 ²¹ *Hand*, 23 Cal. App.4th at 1858.

1 gives claimants direct rights, although the Insurers disagree that *Hand*'s holding would, if reviewed
2 by the California Supreme Court, ultimately be held to be a correct statement of California law.
3 Debtor will be proposing specific Plan language to address this issue.

4 Dated: February 14, 2025

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