

Hartford, CT

H.B. 7408

April 4, 2007

My name is Beth McCabe from Canton, CT. When I was 11 years old I was sexually abused by a priest. I am here to testify regarding H.B. 7408 requesting a change to extend the statute of limitations from 30 to 40 years and create a "window" to enable child victims of horrific sex crimes to expose their perpetrators in court.

The memory of my abuse was hidden for 25 years but there were many scars. Although the abuse happened 45 years ago I will ever get over it.

I have been a co-leader of the Support Network of Those Abused by Priests (SNAP) since 2004. There are over 8,000 members nationwide. There are many who have committed suicide, have drug and alcohol addictions and have experienced unspeakable pain.

Why is takes victims so long to come forward with their abuse? Many victims of abuse survive the only way a twelve year old can and that is repressing it. I did not remember my abuse for 25 years. Some victims never experience repressed memory but live in silence about the abuse, thinking they are the only ones who were abused or thinking that no one will believe them. Many victims cannot come forward in 20 or 30 years because we have repressed the experiences in order to survive. The extension of the statute of limitations is crucial to providing justice to the victims.

Why should the statute of limitation be extended from 30 to 40 years and a “window” be put in place by the legislature to allow claims to go forward in the court?

I would suggest that creating a window will do four things:

Expose the predators. The window enables victims to publicly expose the predators who hurt them, through the open, impartial, judicial system.

Exposing enablers. Through the judicial process, anyone who ignored a sex crime, shielded a molester, destroyed a document or deceived a victim’s family may also be exposed.

Fear of Litigation. With the “window,” decision-makers will know that if they shun a victim or recklessly endanger a child, they may be exposed in court and face consequences for having done so.

Fear of Financial Consequences. Passage of the “window” will prod defense lawyers, public relations staff and others to beef up child sex abuse prevention and education. Smart organizations will start or expand efforts to train adults about reporting abuse and teach kids about “safe touch”.

What would be the implications of such a window?

The reform will protect children right now, expose dangerous men right now, expose complicit employers now, warn parents about predators and at the same time will deter future crimes, deceit and cover-up in this one year window.

It will allow the victims access to the justice system to expose molesters, warn families about them, get them removed from their jobs in teaching, coaching and ministry with little cost to taxpayers.

I ask you to take legal action against our perpetrators so no more kids suffer.

Some would say that creating a window will cause hundreds of claims to be made. The big settlements get the headlines but they are few and far between.

Most victims get nothing. In California after passing legislation and creating a "window" several hundred predators were exposed and removed from positions of access to kids. And thousands of pages of previously secret documents showing cover ups by some church officials were disclosed. As a result, California children are perhaps the safest in the country.

When asked about the cost of clergy abuse lawsuits to the church, a Wisconsin victim once asked "Shouldn't it be expensive if you knowingly allow hundreds of innocent children to be repeatedly sodomized and raped? Shouldn't there be a real penalty?"

What's wrong with the status quo?

The FBI estimates that 90% of all child molesters are never caught. Because of archaic and restrictive statutes of limitations they'll continue to wreck innocent lives and will not be jailed or exposed.

I ask you to hear our stories, nothing will ever change without speaking the truth, I am speaking the truth so that today's children will not experience what we have experienced, will not suffer what we have suffered. I am asking that you

seriously consider extending the statute of limitations from 30 to 40 years and to provide a "window" so that victims can come forward and receive their day in court. Give them an opportunity to expose the perpetrators and the men who covered up these crimes. Will you stand up and be counted as someone who will not tolerate abuse of children. Will you have the courage to speak for thousands of children who cannot speak for themselves?
