

March 26, 2009

To: Senator McDonald, Representative Lawlor and the Members of the Judiciary Committee

From: Kristen Selleck, MSW Student, UConn School of Social Work

RE: *H.B.6532: An Act Concerning the Statute of Limitations for Bringing an Action for Damages for the Sexual Assault of a Minor*

Thank you for your time in hearing my testimony.

I am an MSW student at the University of Connecticut I am here in support of H.B. 6532.

I have worked in the violence against women field for 7 years. In that time, I've worked with numerous adult survivors of child sexual abuse as well as on behalf of children who have been sexually abused. I've worked in community agency, court, and child welfare settings; a common thread in these venues has been the heart-wrenchingly high number of children who have been sexually abused. Throughout the last seven years, I've been touched by the strength of survivors, by their courage to seek help and to heal. What has been clear to me throughout this time is the importance of a survivor having access to healing interventions, such as counseling or other services, as well as an opportunity to empower themselves and hold their perpetrator accountable if they so choose. These important interventions cost money, time, and above all a lot of work on the part of the survivor; being able to access damages for the abuse perpetrated against them can assist a survivor in his or her ability to heal.

We know that children struggle at times to disclose or be able to report sexual abuse in a manner that brings criminal or civil justice for them. In addition, evidence as well as full disclosures and understanding of the abuse may not occur within the current statute of limitations. There is the potential for long-term medical and trauma-related problems for survivors of child sexual abuse. HB 6532 gives those children an opportunity in adulthood to seek damages that may assist them in getting medical or mental health treatment and in having their voices heard.

The occurrence of child sexual abuse is overwhelming. Despite this, I am comforted to know that we live in a state that is committed to helping survivors. In addition, we live in a country that thrives on technological advancement that may give child sexual abuse survivors an opportunity to show a civil court that they were abused years after the occurrence. In instances where new evidence from a technological standpoint, from the coming forward of a witness or survivor, or other ways in which evidence comes forward, a survivor should have the opportunity to attempt to collect damages from the perpetrator. This legislation is important in its expansion of the rights of child sexual abuse survivors.

I thank you for your time.