



*Testimony of Heather Francisco
Adult Advocate, Safe Haven of Greater Waterbury
Committee on Judiciary
April 1, 2019*

Support: SB 3 An Act Combatting Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment

Oppose: *SB 913 An Act Concerning the Extension of the Statute of Limitations for the Prosecution of Sexual Assault*

Hello Senator Winfield, Representative Stafstrom and distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee. My name is Heather Francisco and I am an adult advocate at Safe Haven of Greater Waterbury. Safe Haven is one of four dual programs in the state, providing services to victims/survivors of both sexual violence as well as domestic violence. We offer a safe haven for victims of domestic violence and sexual assault by providing free, confidential services in a safe, caring environment; striving to raise awareness through community education and outreach. Our support, counseling, and advocacy restores hope and helps people reclaim their lives. We serve victims/survivors and their children in the towns of Beacon Falls, Bethlehem, Middlebury, Naugatuck, Oxford, Prospect, Southbury, Thomaston, Waterbury, Watertown, Wolcott and Woodbury.

Thank you for the opportunity to write in support of SB 3, An Act Combatting Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment (*and to show my opposition to SB 913 An Act Concerning the Extension for the Statute of Limitations for the Prosecution of Sexual Assault*). For most sexual assault crimes, Connecticut law provides survivors of sexual violence with a mere five-year statute of limitations to bring their offenders to justice, or, to find redress in the civil court. Connecticut has the third shortest statute of limitations in the country and the shortest overall in New England. The impacts of sexual violence can last a lifetime, but for survivors of sexual violence, the chance to seek help through our criminal justice system does not.

Through the course of my work I have worked with many survivors of sexual violence. I have worked with a majority of survivors who have known their assailant and as a result questioned the dynamics of the assault and whether or not they should report to the police. Most citing that they could “ruin someone’s life” just to hear later from another victim(s) how the offender assaulted others similarly. Imagine feeling so ashamed of what happened that you did not report only to find out you were not the only one who was hurt by this person. I have not heard this scenario once or twice but over and over again people are saying “me too!” Those who once suffered alone in silence are finally speaking out and we must be willing to listen, or risk endangering others because of a failure to allow adequate time to report. Research shows there are high rates of recidivism with sexual crimes.

Social justice and the apprehension of sexual predators should not rely solely on the timely reports of victims of sexual crimes. We must, as a society, send a clear message to offenders that we know they are out there and we are going to hold them accountable for their actions. Victim reports are necessary to raising awareness about how often these crimes are occurring, vital to starting an investigation, and key in supporting the prosecution of an offender. What message are we sending when we tell people they have to report in 5, 10, or even 30 years? We are telling them that their experience was not that big a deal, that they should get over it and come in to give a report as soon as possible or risk losing out on that opportunity. The impacts of sexual violence include but are not limited to: physical and emotional trauma, shame, guilt, self-blame, PTSD, addiction, isolation, self-doubt, and self-harm. We must give victims time to navigate their experiences so they can come forward at their own pace. It is not easy to report a sexual assault or participate in the prosecution of an offender. We must allow people the time needed to gather the strength necessary to do these things without the pressure of a strict time frame. I once learned that the prosecution of a (brutal) sexual assault in the first degree case was going to be plead down to an unlawful restraint because the victim (a client of mine) was not able to testify due to being traumatized by the assault. This is not justice. My client did not have enough time to heal prior to feeling pressure to report and ultimately realizing the likelihood of having to face the offender in court to testify. The offender received a light sentence and was released to society with no warning to others of his history of such a violent offence. Please give victims time.

I have worked with male and female adult survivors of child sexual assault who struggle with the thought that they will never have an opportunity for justice because they missed the small window of opportunity to report due to the fact that they were overwhelmed with the aftermath of the assault. For some, after being groomed for years it takes time for victims to realize the sexual assault was not their fault. The trauma may not be visible but it stops time for many victims. They need time to come to terms with what happened to their bodies and their psyches. It may seem like a simple scenario to someone who has not been raped or molested by their family member: incest is wrong and children do not initiate sex with adults. Yet to someone who was told for years that they were special, who believed that they actively participated in the assaults because at 10 years old they experienced an orgasm, or because they do not recall ever saying no, it is not that simple. It can take years of support and care to get to a point where someone is ready to report the wrongs done to them as children. To put a time frame on these crimes is disgraceful. To allow offenders to get away with their crimes because their victims were too traumatized to come forward is a failure in the justice system. As judiciary committee members you are in a unique position to right these wrongs by voting to give victims time.

At 5 years, Connecticut's civil and criminal statute of limitations has one of the shortest time frames in the country for many victims of sexual assault. It is far too short. 28 states have either no statute of limitations for a period of 20 years or more. Connecticut should follow in the footsteps of these states and not limit the time victims of sexual assault can seek justice.

I urge you to pass SB 3 An Act Combatting Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment to give victims time. Please contact me with any questions.

Thank you.

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Testimony of Naza Bungu

Good Evening Senator Winfield, Representative Stafstrom and distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee.

My name is Naza Bungu, and I am a Licensed Professional Counselor and own a private practice in Milford, CT.

The "Give Victim's Time/ Time's Up Bill is important to me for many reasons. Currently, the State of Connecticut only offers 5 years for the civil and criminal statute of limitations. I am asking that we remove the statute of limitations. There are several reasons why victims do not come forward: they may have been threatened, there is a fear of retaliation by the abuser or fear of how they would be judged by others. These reasons occur for all survivors of sexual assault, including men, women, and children, but I know these reasons all too well for myself.

I was sexually assaulted by Michael Britt when I was 16 years old. I did not report it until I was 18 years old for fear that my mother would blame me for what happened to me and remove me from the house, leaving me with nowhere to live. She was born and raised in Kosovo, so her views on assault are very skewed; within our culture, women are not seen as equals. At the age of 18 and on my own as I had no advocates to help me, reported this to the, Bridgeport Police Department. Nothing was done. And if you research Michael Britt, he sexually assault several underaged females, for which he only received 3 years in prison! Three years? This is not justice given the long-term and permanent psychological damage that victims have to endure as a result of sexual abuse.

I was also sexually assaulted by Antoine Sistrunk on 1/14/2006. I reported the assault on 3/24/2006 with the Bridgeport Police Department, but former Detective Dwayne McBride did not investigate. There is no report on file. Even though I reported my assault, with no support from the Police Department and no advocates, at that time I lost hope for finding any kind of justice.

I recently discovered that Antoine Sistrunk was applying to become a police officer in 7/2018. At this point, I filed with Bridgeport's Internal Affairs. The investigation was closed in 11/2018 with no resolve because of "no evidence" as former Det. McBride did not follow through with the investigation. Due to McBride not investigating, a warrant was never filed and the police department wasn't able to red flag the original report that I filed in 2006 when they were doing the background check for Antoine Sistrunk. If McBride followed through, a rapist would not be currently serving as a police officer. I am still currently residing in Bridgeport, CT and do not feel safe knowing that my rapist is supposed to "protect and serve" in my town. How are the women in this city supposed to be protected when the offender is wearing a badge? I cannot comprehend that as a human being, as a woman, or as a licensed counselor.

In regards to this particular case, I spoke to the following people: The Mayor's Office, Police Chief A J Perez, Captain Fitzgerald, Internal Affairs Office, the Police Commissioners, and the Chief State's Attorney's Office. I was disappointed yet again by the "law" due to the statute of limitations. Connecticut is supposedly considered a progressive state, but how is that we have a statute of limitations of 5 years for sexual abuse? We need to do a better job in protecting our people and to provide the support and justice that is deserved. I truly hope that you consider the testimonies brought forth to you regarding the removal of the statute of limitations and to consider all survivors who will continue to be affected by it if the current law remains in effect.

Please consider the damage that sexual assault causes. It's bad enough that the victim's have to endure the psychological and physical pain as a result of the assault, but also consider the guilt, shame, and

embarrassment they experience when they finally have the courage to file a report and the legal system states that “it’s too late”. This law tells survivors that it is too late to have a voice, to receive justice, and to prevent it from happening to others.

Let’s change this. NOW. Let’s be better. Let’s do better. Make a difference in our society. It is 2019 and it’s time for victim’s voices to be heard and not silenced. The statute of limitations only signifies that victims will continue to be silenced. I do not wish this experience on anyone, but please imagine what you would want for your loved ones, family members, children, or friends and would go through if they survivors of sexual assault. What would you want the law to say to them? We protect you and thank you for coming forward? Or It is too late for you to find justice. Please pass the Give Victims Time/ Time’s Up Bill.

Thank you for your consideration. You may reach me directly at (203) 848-9350 if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Naza Bungu, LPC, LADC
(Survivor of Sexual Abuse)