

Safe Haven of Greater Waterbury

**Testimony of Sarah Holmes
Community Educator
Safe Haven of Greater Waterbury
Committee on Judiciary
April 1, 2019**

Support: S.B. 3 An Act Combatting Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment

Oppose: S.B. 913 An Act Concerning the Extension of the Statute of Limitations for the Prosecution of Sexual Assault

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

My name is Sarah Holmes, I am a Community Educator for Safe Haven of Greater Waterbury, one of nine member centers of the Connecticut Alliance to End Sexual Violence. Safe Haven of Greater Waterbury provides a variety of services to individuals who have been affected by sexual assault and/or domestic violence. Safe Haven of Greater Waterbury provides sexual assault services to the towns of Beacon Falls, Bethlehem, Middlebury, Naugatuck, Oxford, Prospect, Southbury, Thomaston, Watertown, Waterbury, Wolcott and Woodbury.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of S.B. 3, An Act Combatting Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment (and to show my opposition to S.B. 913 An Act Concerning the Extension for the Statute of Limitations for the Prosecution of Sexual Assault). Connecticut has the third shortest statute of limitations in the country and the shortest overall in New England. Eliminating the statute of limitations for sexual assault cases will extend the opportunity to seek justice to many more victims and survivors of sexual violence than are currently able to due to the short window of time the current statute of limitations allows. The ability to seek justice through the criminal justice system after living in secrecy and silence for years, or even decades, can help victims heal from the trauma they experienced, and, hold perpetrators of sexual violence accountable for their crimes.

Sexual violence is a crime which thrives in secrecy and shame; it is not unusual for survivors to wait months, years, even decades to disclose a sexual assault due to fear and the stigmas attached to their experience. In addition to coping with the trauma of an assault, survivors often face threats by the offender or their family members or friends, and risk being blamed, shamed or scrutinized publicly for the assault if they disclose or report abuse to seek support and justice they deserve.

Additionally, law enforcement and prosecutors also need sufficient time to conduct thorough investigations, collect evidence, interview witnesses and build a case. There have been numerous cases where the statute of limitations has expired before a case has been built, which deprives the victim an opportunity for justice through no fault of their own.

Recent high profile cases that have garnered national attention illustrate the ability for perpetrators of sexual violence to escape or nearly escape prosecution due to statute of limitations. Consider the cases against Jerry Sandusky, Bill Cosby, Harry Weinstein, Larry Nassar, and numerous cases of sexual abuse perpetrated by clergy members within the Catholic Church. In all cases, many victims who exhibited tremendous courage to come forward with their stories were unable to receive justice through the courts due to statutes of limitations.

Eliminating the statute of limitations for sexual assault would not change the burden of proof required in a court case. Despite concerns surrounding lost evidence or forgotten memories, prosecutors would not pursue sexual assault cases without enough evidence to build a viable case, as they currently do.

S.B. 913 An Act Concerning the Extension for the Statute of Limitations for the Prosecution of Sexual Assault will only continue to diminish the opportunity for justice for survivors.

Currently, Connecticut has one of the shortest windows for statutes of limitations in cases of sexual assault in the nation, and, has the shortest statute of limitations for sexual assault crimes compared to surrounding states. 28 states have either no statute of limitations or statute of limitations for a period of 20 years or more. As a national leader in laws to protect and support survivors of sexual violence, it seems only appropriate that Connecticut should take the step to eliminate the statute of limitations for sexual assault crimes.

I urge you to pass S.B. 3 An Act Combatting Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment to give victims time.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sarah Holmes
Community Educator
Safe Haven of Greater Waterbury
29 Central Ave
Waterbury, CT 06721
(203) 575-0388 ext. 131
sholmes@safehavenofgw.org