

Senator Winfield, Representative Stafstrom, Senator Kissel, Representative Rebimbas, and distinguished members of the Committee on Judiciary, I write in support of SB 3 in general, and specifically in support of eliminating or extending the statute of limitations for sexual assault for both criminal and civil cases.

My name is Steve Kennedy, and I live in Fairfield. Thank you for the opportunity to share my story with you. I had never shared this publicly before, but I am a survivor of sexual assault at the hands of a priest.

When I was six years old, I attended a Catholic school in Milford. Under the cover of punishing me for misbehavior, a priest pulled me from recess and said that he was taking me to the principal's office. Instead, he took me to the basement. He told me that I had everyone believing that I was a good kid. They may be fooled but he could see me for who I was, and he needed to teach me a lesson. He told me to pull my pants down, and when I started to cry he pushed me back against the wall and told me to stop. I stopped, and he grabbed my penis and scrotum and squeezed, not hard enough to hurt, but enough to show me that I was trapped. I can still feel the burning heat I felt in my chest as I tried to hold everything in.

That priest made me kill a part of myself. I couldn't be that six-year-old with his body on fire and full of fear and shame. I went up into my head, and I never came back out. With my little fists balled at my sides, head down, I strangled the part of me that was feeling all of that pain. It never came back out of that basement. Without realizing it, I have been too afraid to let anyone close since then. I never thought about the abuse; it was so completely internalized that my only experience of it was the certainty that there was something rotten inside of me, and I could never let anyone see me for who I was or they would be horrified.

I thought I deserved it. I thought that if I could be good enough, if I could do enough, maybe I could make up for the rot inside of me. It didn't even turn me against the church; if anything it made me more dependent on it. Even after my family stopped attending regularly, when I got my license, I started going by myself. I did my Eagle Scout project making a prayer garden at my church. I got good grades in school. I did everything my parents told me to. I could never let myself be seen in the same way the priest had seen me, and that didn't leave any room for my self. I can't even fathom the potential relationships I have lost and the capacity for intimacy that I will never get back.

I am 32 years old, and I am only just at a point where I can confront this. Since the public hearing, I confirmed with a prosecutor that in my case I would have had to file a report by the time I was 23 years old. Think about when you were 23: do you really believe that you could have confronted an existential crisis like this when you were that age, after feeling like keeping it in was the only thing that had kept you alive and sane up to that point? I certainly couldn't. And because of that, the perpetrator is still out there. He has been accused by three others, and I can't imagine how many more of us there are. I didn't want to see myself as a kid whose life had been destroyed by a predator. I just wanted to live my life, but the burden of his crime fell entirely on my shoulders. I don't want any money. I am at least

“fortunate” in the sense that I could acknowledge this before the civil statute of limitations passed, but that won’t keep other kids from being hurt.

The stigma around sexual assault makes it incredibly difficult for survivors to come forward within a given timeframe. Eliminating or extending the statute of limitations is necessary. As time goes on, it becomes harder to defend against these cases, but with the burden of proof on the prosecution, it is even harder for a survivor to actually see justice as time goes on. Because of the nature of this crime, the current system is completely stacked against survivors. Just because there are potential complications to extending the statute of limitations does not mean that we should continue to rely on a broken system that leaves victims with nowhere to go and predators roaming free. I urge you to support SB 3 and give some hope to survivors and allow predators to be brought to justice.