

# CONNECTICUT ALLIANCE TO END SEXUAL VIOLENCE



Support. Advocate. Prevent.

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Post-Conviction Victim Advocate with the Connecticut Alliance to End Sexual Violence  
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

Distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee: my name is Bridget Koestner, and I am a post-conviction victim advocate with the Connecticut Alliance to End Sexual Violence.

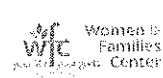
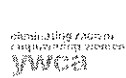
Thank you for allowing me to speak in support the SB 3, An Act Combatting Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment (and to show my opposition to SB 913 An Act Concerning the Extension for the Statute of Limitations for the Prosecution of Sexual Assault). For most sexual assault crimes, Connecticut law provides 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.

Based on my experience as a victim advocate, there are a variety of reasons why individuals often delay reporting for many years at a time.

Victims may be isolated by others or may isolate themselves after being sexually assaulted or abused, and may lack the social support they would need to go through the reporting process. It may not be until they have that support that they will feel ready to move forward in reporting the offense.

Due to the fact that many victims and offenders have mutual friends or family members, or offenders are in positions of power, there are also many situations where other may encourage the victim to keep their experience to themselves, to prevent the offender from “getting into trouble”. This lack of support and encouragement of suppression can lead them to keeping the experience to themselves.

Sexual assault myths and victim blaming culture, and/or the dynamics of the offense that they individually experience, may also play a role in this delay. Victims blaming themselves or being blamed by others is a notable barrier to reporting. Another individual may not recognize immediately that what occurred was actually a criminal offense, because in many cases, an offender may groom a victim to believe that what is happening is okay or that it is the victim’s fault. This sort of grooming is especially prevalent when the offense involves a minor. Societal misconceptions about sexual assault or reporting may also prevent a victim from coming forward, and it may not be until they speak with someone who is well informed that they realize reporting is even an option for them.



Victims may also shut down as a reaction to the trauma they experienced, and refusing to talk about what has happened is a common reaction to a trauma such as sexual assault and abuse. It may take years until someone is prepared to discuss what they went through, even with those they're closest with.

They may also be dealing with the psychological impact of what has occurred through experiences of depression, anxiety, PTSD, or suicide attempts, and have their time and energy consumed in addressing this crisis and recovery before they can even consider reporting.

Additionally, fear of the offender and of retaliation often prevents people from coming forward, and it may not be until they feel safe enough to report that they do so. This may take a great deal of time and/or distance.

Lastly, but just as importantly, individuals may not be ready to come forward until they recognize that another person has been victimized or may be victimized by the same person who harmed them. As we commonly see in the media, and I commonly see in the field, it often happens that victims will be ready to report because they found out that they were not the only one who had experienced a sexual assault by this person. They may feel that this validates their experience enough that they are ready to come forward with the support of other victims, or they may wish to report in order to work toward stopping this individual's pattern of harmful behavior.

In any and all of these situations, it may very well take a victim many years to come forward. Reporting this offense is often a very important part of a victim's healing, and they should have the opportunity to pursue that process, for the wellbeing of themselves and the wellbeing of communities, no matter how long it takes. It should be recognized that even many years down the line, many victims are still substantially impacted by a sexual assault or sexual abuse that they experienced.

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 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.

With these considerations in mind, I urge you to pass SB 3 An Act Combatting Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment to give victims time.

Thank you.

Bridget Koestner