



Testimony of Ann Rodwell-Lawton
Legislative Liaison, Women's Center of Greater Danbury

Supporting; S.B. 3 An Act Combatting Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment
Opposing; S.B. 913 An Act Concerning the Extension of the Statute of Limitations for the Prosecution
of Sexual Assault

Judiciary Committee Public Hearing
April 1, 2019

Good evening Senator Winfield, Representative Stafstrom and distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee. The Women's Center of Greater Danbury provides free life-saving services to victims of domestic violence and sexual assault in 13 towns in the Greater Danbury area including Bethel, Bridgewater, Brookfield, Danbury, Kent, New Fairfield, New Milford, Newtown, Redding, Ridgefield, Roxbury, Sherman, and Washington. Services include counseling, support groups, safety planning, court-based advocacy, transportation, assistance with securing basic needs and job training, coordination with local law enforcement, and prevention education and training, among others. We are a community-based member center of the Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence and the Connecticut Alliance to End Sexual Violence.

Thank you for allowing me to speak in support the 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). 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. Completely eliminating the criminal statute of limitations will give both victims and prosecutors the time they need to bring justice, as justice should not have an expiration date. **I respectfully urge you to support S.B. 3.**

Recently, we worked with an adult victim who went to the police to report sexual abuse that occurred years ago. A family member assaulted her over a period of multiple years. Her case quickly fell apart as the police could only prosecute one incident out of many that occurred because all other incidents went beyond the statute of limitations. This victim expressed concern over why only one of her assaults was viewed as "legitimate" while the other assaults "didn't count." To her, and to many other victims we have worked with, statute of limitations seem arbitrary. Victims are confused as to why these laws negate their experiences and negate their ability to seek justice through the criminal justice system. In this case, statute of limitations undermined her faith in the system that was supposed to help her.

As sexual assault victim advocates, we know that sexual assault is unlike other crimes. Victims need time to heal and may not feel safe coming forward. They face multiple barriers to reporting immediately after the assault and choose very carefully if, when, and to whom they will disclose. In addition to coping with the impact of trauma experienced by the assault, survivors often face threats by the offender or their

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family members or friends, and risk being blamed, shamed, or scrutinized for their assault if they disclose or report. Eliminating the statute of limitations is necessary to give victims the time they may need to seek support and services after an assault, and to make empowered and informed decisions to report their assault to law enforcement, seek legal counsel, or pursue a case in court. Connecticut has one of the smallest reporting windows for sexual assault crimes in the country.

Completely eliminating the criminal statute of limitations will give prosecutors the time they need to bring justice. After an assault is reported, prosecutors and law enforcement need time to conduct an investigation, collect evidence, interview witnesses and build a case. There have been cases where the statute of limitations has expired before a case can be fully built, which deprives the victim a chance for justice through no fault of their own. Five years has not always been enough time to investigate and bring a case against a perpetrator, allowing some likely offenders to go free. Eliminating the statute of limitations for sexual assault would not change the burden of proof in a court case. Despite concerns about lost evidence or forgotten memories, prosecutors would not pursue sexual assault cases without enough evidence to build a viable case, as they do currently.

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. Connecticut's statute of limitations for sexual assault crimes should be removed to fully acknowledge the impact of trauma on survivors of sexual violence and the barriers they face when reporting, and to hold the persons who commit acts of sexual violence accountable. 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.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Please do not hesitate to contact me with questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

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