



**The Center for
Family Justice**

**Testimony of Angela Schlingheyde, JD
Director of Legal & Court Advocacy Services
The Center for Family Justice, Inc.**

**In Support of SB 3 An Act Combatting Sexual Assault and Sexual
Harassment
Judiciary Committee
Monday, April 1, 2019**

BOARD OF DIRECTORS:

CHAIRPERSON:

Valerie Foster
Pathway to Mindfulness

Rosinne Chlala
The Festivities Foundation

Ann E. Clark, PhD
Community Leader

Donna Craft
Community Leader

Christy DeSantis
Unilever

Jill Fitzburgh
Community Leader

Catherine Gallagher
Community Leader

Sofia Goncalves
People's United Bank

Chris D. Griffin
BNY Mellon Wealth Management

Anthony Iannini
GE Capital

Michael E. Lyngaas
Community Leader

Kathryn Maiolo
KM Solutions, LLC

Sarah Cwikla Mastropole
Stantec

Donna E. Milne
Key Private Bank

Matthew C. Reale
Attorney, Anthony & Reale

Rev. Sara Smith, Esq.
United Congregational Church

Lisa M. Todd
Webster Bank

PRESIDENT, CEO:

Debra A. Greenwood

Good afternoon, Senator Winfield, Representative Stafstrom and distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee. My name is Angela Schlingheyde, and I am the Director of Legal & Court Advocacy services at The Center for Family Justice in Bridgeport. We are a member agency of the Connecticut Alliance to End Sexual Violence and the Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence. The Center for Family Justice, provides life-saving services which include 24/7 Crisis Hotline and Safe House, Civil and Criminal Court Advocacy, Community Education and Prevention, Domestic Violence Advocacy, Sexual Violence Advocacy, Legal Services, and a Multidisciplinary Investigative Team for children who disclose sexual assault. We serve victims in the towns of Bridgeport, Fairfield, Easton, Stratford, Monroe, and Trumbull.

Thank you for allowing me to speak 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). As the national media shines a spotlight on sexual violence in our country, those of us working in victim services are seeing a significant increase in sexual violence survivors coming forward to seek help. At The Center for Family Justice, we have seen a 53% increase in services for sexual assault victims and a 57% increase in calls to our Sexual Violence crisis hotline.

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 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 the judicial system does not.

Hope Starts Here

753 Fairfield Avenue, Bridgeport, Connecticut 06604 • Tel: 203/334-6154 • Fax: 203/579-8882 • www.centerforfamilyjustice.org





**The Center for
Family Justice**

BOARD OF DIRECTORS:

CHAIRPERSON:

Valerie Foster
Pathway to Mindfulness

Rosinne Chlala
The Festivities Foundation

Ann E. Clark, PhD
Community Leader

Donna Craft
Community Leader

Christy DeSantis
Unilever

Jill Fitzburgh
Community Leader

Catherine Gallagher
Community Leader

Sofia Goncalves
People's United Bank

Chris D. Griffin
BNY Mellon Wealth Management

Anthony Iannini
GE Capital

Michael E. Lyngaas
Community Leader

Kathryn Maiolo
KM Solutions, LLC

Sarah Cwikla Mastropole
Stantec

Donna E. Milne
Key Private Bank

Matthew C. Reale
Attorney, Anthony & Reale

Rev. Sara Smith, Esq.
United Congregational Church

Lisa M. Todd
Webster Bank

PRESIDENT, CEO:

Debra A. Greenwood

In order to illustrate how essential it is to eliminate the current statute of limitations for sexual assault, I would like to share with you the story of a survivor we will call Michael. Michael was raped by his neighbor. As one would expect, he was extremely traumatized by this experience. He was also terrified to tell anyone because the neighbor lived close by and knew Michael's family and friends well. Additionally, Michael is autistic which made him particularly vulnerable and created additional barriers to him reporting. After nine years of struggling with this trauma alone, Michael finally found the courage to come forward and report the sexual assault. The police investigated and the perpetrator confessed to the allegations. However, due to the fact that the statute of limitations had expired, the case could not move forward and the perpetrator was never held accountable. He also continued to be a threat to public safety. Michael was devastated and blamed himself for the outcome.

Michael's experiences are shared by too many victims of sexual violence. The impact of trauma is very real and can last a lifetime. According to the National Institutes of Health, sexual violence is a leading cause of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. The violation of sexual assault is unlike any other crime and it often takes victims longer to process the event. For many, the five year window has closed before they have even come to terms with their victimization. However, as we see a cultural shift in our nation, victims are learning that they are not alone. They are beginning to cope with their trauma and know that they will be supported and believed. Our survivors tells us that walking through the door and asking for help is terrifying because they are afraid they will be blamed, shamed or scrutinized for their assault. But hearing so many survivors bravely come forward over the last year or so has inspired others to reach out for help and for justice. It is our duty and obligation to these survivors to help them find the justice they deserve.

As a former prosecutor, I have the utmost respect for our criminal justice system and the protections in place for those who are accused of a crime. Let us be clear that this proposed legislation does **nothing** to damage those protections. Eliminating the statute of limitations does not change the burden of proof required for a criminal case to move forward. Additionally, the notion that so many victims create false allegations of



Hope Starts Here



**The Center for
Family Justice**

BOARD OF DIRECTORS:

CHAIRPERSON:

Valerie Foster
Pathway to Mindfulness

Rosinne Chlala
The Festivities Foundation

Ann E. Clark, PhD
Community Leader

Donna Craft
Community Leader

Christy DeSantis
Unilever

Jill Fitzburgh
Community Leader

Catherine Gallagher
Community Leader

Sofia Goncalves
People's United Bank

Chris D. Griffin
BNY Mellon Wealth Management

Anthony Iannini
GE Capital

Michael E. Lyngaas
Community Leader

Kathryn Maiolo
KM Solutions, LLC

Sarah Cwikla Mastropole
Stantec

Donna E. Milne
Key Private Bank

Matthew C. Reale
Attorney, Anthony & Reale

Rev. Sara Smith, Esq.
United Congregational Church

Lisa M. Todd
Webster Bank

PRESIDENT, CEO:

Debra A. Greenwood

sexual assault is simply not true. In fact, these crimes are still grossly underreported due to the barriers put in place by our laws and our culture. RAINN (Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network) reports that only 310 out of 1000 sexual assaults are reported: in other words, 2 out of 3 sexual assaults are unreported by the victim. Currently, there is no statute of limitations on rape with a weapon or when DNA evidence is collected at the time of the crime. However, this exclusion covers only a small percentage of sexual assault crimes. Connecticut's statute of limitations must be eliminated for all sexual assault crimes 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. It is time for Connecticut to progress forward and let victims and survivors know that they deserve the opportunity to seek justice and justice should never have an expiration date.

In regards to civil claims involving sexual assault, we have seen many examples in recent years of why it is so important to allow victims of sexual assault, whether they are a minor or an adult, the opportunity to file a claim when they are ready to do so. We have seen numerous cases involving the Catholic Church, Boy Scouts of America, many private educational institutions, as well as individuals such as Bill Cosby, Harvey Weinstein and Les Moonves. The number of sexual violence victims is staggering and the lengths these individuals and organizations have gone through to cover up the sexual crimes is horrifying. The effects of sexual violence often last a lifetime and individuals who are suffering from these terrible violations deserve the time and space to accept their victimization, process what has happened and move beyond the trauma. The law must reflect the uniqueness of sexual assault and adapt the statutes accordingly. Our victims and survivors deserve nothing less. Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

Angela Schlingheyde, J.D.

Director of Legal and Court Advocacy Services

The Center for Family Justice, Inc.

203-332-6154/aschlingheyde@centerforfamilyjustice.org



Hope Starts Here