

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 1
Civil Actions – Child Sexual Abuse – Definition, Damages, and Statute of Limitations
(The Child Victims Act of 2023)
****SUPPORT****

TO: Hon. Luke Clippinger, Chair, and members of the House Judiciary Committee

FROM: Christopher Gavagan

DATE: March 2, 2023

My name is Chris Gavagan I am an advisor with the US Olympic Committee's Safe Sport program and had the honor of delivering the keynote address at their inaugural SafeSport Leadership Conference. I have produced and directed a documentary project called *Coached into Silence* which deals specifically with sexual abuse in youth sports. The silence referred to in the title is threefold: the silence of *shame* victims can experience, the silence of *institutions* protecting themselves first, and finally the *legal silencing* of the victims in their search for justice.

Those who have suffered sexual abuse as children have become tragic experts in a field that the rest of the world wants to pretend does not exist. Yet survivors can be society's lifeguards. While millions of children splash about in the surf right now, there are sharks circling. Survivors bear the scars of these sharks. We are the ones who can say "There. There is the predator that attacked me." We must give those who know, the chance to say what they know.

The statute of limitations has taken the whistles from the lifeguards. Victims are forced to watch; helpless, mute—as predators sink their teeth into the next victim, and the next victim. While we scream on the sand, child after child is snatched from the sunlight and dragged to the darkness below. Not every child will survive to see the surface again. None will emerge from this fully intact.

The statute of limitations by its very existence in cases of child sex abuse—create more victims. Many lawmakers seem to cast their vote as if they believe a shark, once fed, will never eat again. The reality is that these predators will feed for a lifetime, on our children. And the short statute of limitations guarantees 30, 40, 50 more years of children—our children—your children—as prey. A generation of children that could so easily have been spared.

The most direct way that I can illustrate this point, is to provide this link to the video of an interview that I conducted with my own former coach and abuser. This 4 minute video shows him admitting sexual abuse, defending it as a "lesson", and then laughing with relief at the statute of limitations: <https://vimeo.com/coachedintosilence/coachsolve>

I strongly support HB 1 as a tool to give survivors back their voice and bring accountability in the effort to prevent any child from becoming The Next Victim.