

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB134:
CIVIL ACTIONS - CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE -
DEFINITION AND STATUTE OF LIMITATIONS
****SUPPORT****

TO: Hon. William C. Smith, Jr. Chair, and members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

FROM: Frank Schindler

DATE: January 24, 2021

I am 70 years old. When I was in kindergarten in the fall of 1954, at the age of 5, I was sexually abused by a priest several times a week for approximately 6 months. At that age the ability to process & understand what is going on around you is limited under any circumstances, much less in circumstances that are painful & traumatic. And this abuse is being perpetrated by an individual you are told is the representative of God on earth, must be listened to & obeyed, and can do nothing wrong. To speak out or even acknowledge the abuse is simply unthinkable. At such times neurological structures in the brain act to shield you from those memories, in part by suppressing & fragmenting them. But those protective actions themselves influence & distort your life, and there is no deadline or timetable for how the brain operates or changes.

For years I struggled with the consequences of the abuse. With the guilt & shame of being bad & the belief that I needed to be punished. That the abuse was perpetrated "for your own good". I have had to deal with depression, self-loathing and the inability to take pride or pleasure in anything I may have accomplished. These feelings led to my repeatedly questioning my right to live, doing things that ultimately caused me harm.

And when years of therapy begin to bear fruit, when you slowly begin to remember, to understand, to come out from under the guilt & shame, you are prevented from speaking your truth by the imposition of a completely arbitrary time limit. A time limit which protects & enables the abuser & allows the Catholic Church to systematically & institutionally abrogate its responsibility to the vulnerable children placed in their care. And then I am blamed for not speaking out earlier - for not doing what was not possible for me to do. Once again I am told it is my fault, just as I was told when I was 5 years old.

And when all else fails, the Catholic Church reduces the pervasive, institutionalized destruction of lives to simply the cost of doing business – "product liability". But it is actually the survivors who pay the cost.

There is no statute of limitations on the consequences of sexual abuse. 66 years later I am still struggling with those consequences. There should be no statute of limitations on the responsibility of the perpetrators & those who protect them. The defense of the statute of limitations by the Catholic Church is simply another in the long line of ways by which it refuses to accept any responsibility for the destruction of the lives of thousands of children. The Catholic Church does not act to protect & defend the abused; they act to protect & defend the abuser.

The Catholic Church alone has made this an adversarial procedure. Instead of maintaining an “us vs them” posture they could have (& even now may be able to) make this into a situation where the Church & the survivors stand together against the true “them”: the perpetrators, the abusers, the criminals.

When I was a child, I was taught that baptism in the Catholic Church placed an “indelible mark on your soul”. Indelible - no statute of limitations. Unfortunately, in my case & countless others, the marks of membership in that church are destructive & tragic. But even more unfortunately, they are indeed indelible.

I ask you to support fairness & justice for a 5 year old.

For these reasons, I urge a favorable committee report, and passage of SB134 without amendments.