

**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 134:
CIVIL ACTIONS – CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE – DEFINITION AND STATUTE OF
LIMITATIONS
SUPPORT**

**TO: Hon. Chairman William C. Smith, Hon. Vice Chair Jeff Waldstreicher, Senate
Judicial Proceedings Committee**

FROM: Benjamin Lorenz

DATE: 02/02/2021

Thank you for hearing my testimony.

My name is Ben Lorenz. I am proudly a husband to Renee, father to Leah and Ezra and son to David and Judy. My reason for testifying is to bear witness on two levels, personal and professional, to the need for a change to the statute of limitations for civil suits in cases of sexual abuse of minors, notably in HB263 and SB134.

When I was 15 years old, I remember seeing on the news a wave of stories about adults, ranging in ages from late 20s into even their 60s, coming forward to share publicly that prominent figures had sexually abused them in their youth. These people had hidden away this important information from the police, from their parents, from their siblings, from their children, sometimes even from their spouses. In most cases, it was a secret they held as closely to their hearts as anything you can imagine. Each one of them, individually, suspected they were the only victims. Most expected that no one would believe them if they told someone else. For decades, in silence, they waited, unaware that dozens of others were experiencing the same torture, stemming from the same type of original trauma.

This was a national story I'm sure you all recall, but there is no need for me to specifically mention the common religious tradition from which these stories originated. That simply is not germane to the root of the problem. The root of the problem wasn't faith or religion; it was that a predator knowingly exploited the immaturity of their victims. An adult - a sick adult - is capable of manipulating the naivete of a child in a manner most of us can't even consider in order to silence their victims for years. It's such an effective tactic that young people often lock

this secret away for decades, convinced they are alone and that they were at fault.

I have witnessed this process firsthand when, months into this national wave of revelation, my parents called a family meeting where my father revealed that he himself was a victim of a predator during his high school years. At that time, it had been over 25 years since the original abuse occurred and I was a teenager, still working on understanding how different people process emotions. In spite of both of those facts, it was unmistakably clear that this man, my father, one of the most resilient people I know, was nowhere near healed from this experience.

In 2002, David had a devoted wife of 20 years, four well-adjusted children, a prolific professional career, a home in a nice middle class town and a social circle of people who loved and cared about him. If any survivor was in a position to process their trauma and heal, it was someone in this setting. And yet, after telling us of the initial abuse, my father relayed to us that, to some degree, he still believed it was his fault, that he should have done more to stop it. He said this repeatedly, prompting my mother to step into the conversation to say “No, it wasn’t and isn’t your fault.” You must understand that this man had more resources than most survivors. His slow journey towards processing his trauma cannot be attributed to any external circumstance; it is instead a reflection of the reality of abuse: Time is critical and personal.

An objection I have heard levied a lot to this legislation is that our society has learned about how painful abuse is and that the stigma attached to survivors has been diminished or extinguished. They argue that future generations will be able to process abuse more quickly;

Trauma resulting from abuse is literally brain-altering, so expecting someone to recover or to process on a fixed timeline is both unreasonable and unrealistic. I have worked in education for over a decade, as both an administrator and a teacher. In both roles, I have learned about students of mine who have been victimized by predators. In all of these cases, I did what is both legally and morally required and I shared that information with the appropriate police department, while ensuring that the student receives care from the school counsellor. But worth noting here is that the students have, in every case, objected to calling the Police. Even students who were abused years earlier were not immediately ready to make the information public. If you asked those students what another person

should do, in a nearly identical situation, they would respond that the teacher or adult should tell the Police and that the victim should not be ashamed. Their trauma has physically caused them to reserve an unjustified expectation of themselves.

To summarize my support of this bill: It would be improper to expect a human being to respond rationally and predictably to an irrational and unpredictable event. Yet, laws that provide a statute of limitations on civil suits for sexual abuse do exactly that, requiring children to heal and process on an arbitrary and immutable timeline. Please support victims of sexual abuse by removing these barricades and allow them to seek the justice they so deeply deserve on their own timeline. ***For these reasons, I urge a favorable committee report and passage of Senate Bill 134 without amendment.***