

Thank you Representative Rozzi for being such a steadfast advocate for victims of sexual assault, your passion and commitment is so appreciated by those of us in the field. I want to thank Representative Murt and Senator Rob Tepliz for having the courage to champion statute of limitation reform. I feel honored to stand here with each of you as we attempt to blaze a vital path of justice for victims of sexual violence in PA.

Statute of Limitations reform is necessary for so many reasons, we know the prevalence of sexual violence is staggering in our society, we hear numbers like 1 in 4 women and 1 in 6 men will be

sexually assault by age 18 and we also know that 68% of sexual assaults are not reported to the police and I am going to guess that that has something to do with the fact that 98% of all rapists never spend a single day in jail or prison for the horror they have inflicted upon others. What we know is there are survivors among us in every facet of our community, offenders and victims alike are from all walks of life. I stand with you today as one of those survivors of childhood sexual assault and I am telling you it is time for CHANGE.

Currently, victims of sexual assault over the age of 18 have 12 years to report sexual assault in

Pennsylvania. Victims under the age of 18 who were born before August 27, 2002 have 12 years after their 18th birthday OR up until their 30th birthday to file criminal charges.

Sexual assault victims under the age of 18 who were born after August 27, 2002 have 32 years after their 18th birthday OR up until their 50th birthday to file criminal charges.

Confused yet?

Imagine being a victim and not only having to endure the physical, emotional and psychological aftermath of being sexually abused as a child but when you finally find the courage or have the cognitive ability

to understand that you have been victimized, now you need to become a mathematician to know whether or not you have any legal rights in the state of Pennsylvania.

As the Victim Advocate of the Commonwealth it is my duty to represent the interests of all crime victims and ensure their rights are afforded to them. I am fully supportive of reforming our current statute of limitations by eliminate any and all barriers to justice for crime victims. The emotional and psychological aftermath of sexual violence is something no one can truly understand unless they

have experienced it themselves, there are a plethora of reasons why victims do not always break their silence in what outsiders would consider a “timely manner”.

Societal stigma

Fear

Shame

Guilt

Backlash from community or family.

Or the fact that victims of sexual assault are:

3 times more likely to suffer from depression.

6 times more likely to suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder.

13 times more likely to abuse alcohol.

26 times more likely to abuse drugs.

4 times more likely to contemplate suicide.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and
Preventions children who are abused also
experience a higher risk for heart, lung and liver
diseases, obesity, cancer, high blood pressure and
cholesterol and suffer anxiety.

All of this, factors into the silence that encases
victims and emboldens offenders.

As a state we add insult to injury when a victim or survivor finally reaches the courageous place where they feel safe to disclose and we tell them it's too late for them to seek justice.

It is simply unacceptable!

I stand here today in full support of the various bills that are being introduced to eliminate the arduous math equations, to free up the confusion and to enable victims of sexual assault a path to justice.

The worst thing you can say to a victim is “I am so sorry but there is nothing you can do.” It only reinforces the guilt and shame that kept them from coming forward to begin with because the system basically says “Sorry, you should have come forward sooner.” Additionally these barriers confuse society and reinforce stereotypes as we have seen in the Cosby case where we have had close to 40 women come forward but who couldn’t prosecute—so society says, “Well he is innocent until proven guilty” but what if the law bars you from proving such?

Equally as dangerous, it also empowers the offenders. As we saw in the case of the Duggars, the family kept quiet, knowingly hid a perpetrator and disempowered the victims who happened to be family members- until they knew the statute of limitations was exhausted in their case and that the offender could not be held legally responsible.

Our laws must be changed to ensure every single victim who is brave enough to step out of the shadows of darkness has a path lit for them that leads to justice.

I don't know about you, but I plan to be that light for victims of sexual abuse and support these brave legislators who are trying to do so as well. Today, I ask for you to be that light by supporting these efforts as well.

Thank you.