

I am an adult female survivor (in my mid-30s)* of childhood sexual abuse perpetrated by my brother who is a few years older than I am (less than 5 years). This abuse took place from the time I was in second grade until I was in high school, or approximately 9 years. I have been in the ongoing care of a psychologist for 13 years.

I have read Bill H762 and the Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) Questionnaire and would like to share the following comments for consideration from the perspective of a resident of Vermont who actually has an “adverse childhood experience” and would be affected by the passing of this Bill into law:

My understanding is that based on a research report that shows survivors of abuse have a greater incidence of medical ailments in future life, that some individuals in legislature believe that somehow knowing who those individuals are might lessen the cost of their medical care, and so wish to make certain compensation to doctors dependent on the issuance of a questionnaire targeted to identify abuse.

For me as a survivor, I feel that the biggest point is being missed. The goal should be first and foremost protecting those that weren't protected. I was violated as a child. I was not allowed to have control over what happened to my body. I experienced something that I was developmentally unable to fully understand and will continue to be a factor in my life, no matter how good I get at dealing with the emotional fallout. Trust is the single hardest thing to give to anyone and trust is also one of the most basic key components in a doctor-patient relationship. The simple fact of being a patient means turning your body (and sometimes mind), over to open inspection by the doctor with the belief that they are working your behalf and in your best interest, and that it is a personal relationship. It is a trust that their methods are not governed or motivated by their compensation amount or the threat of not receiving any, not by a State legislature that doesn't have the same education and training to analyze a patient's symptoms and what is causing them. The development of that trust is crucial. Truthful answers to questions need to be provided in order to get properly directed and adequate health care. I can honestly say that if a doctor asked me the questions on the questionnaire I would flat out lie, even now in my 30s, after years of therapy. The belief that an individual would answer these questions and that it wouldn't result in their negative reaction to the medical personnel and a subsequent withdrawal from pursuing it is misguided and a bit obtuse.

I would certainly have lied as a child. Every child I know that goes to the doctor is accompanied by a parent or guardian. The issuance of this questionnaire fails to understand the impacts of abuse and the response of those experiencing it. It's not an overt open thing. In order for me to find a way to deal, everything had to look perfect and good. It was a giant game of pretend. There were chinks in that armor that I knew and that I can see now. The goal should be training professionals to identify those chinks.

I actually have medical ailments. Right now I am undergoing physical therapy focused on core strengthening after a severe disc herniation. I also have exercised induced asthma and need to use an albuterol inhaler prior to engaging in exercise and sports activities such as swimming, biking or similar. And I am also under the care of a rheumatologist for screening/testing for a chronic auto-immune

disease on an annual basis. The knowledge that I have been sexually abused, even if it could be proven these health issues were a direct cause of it, would not alter the care or treatment of them, nor how much they cost.

What is true is that I was violated as a child and I am hypervigilant to guard against being violated again. I was not allowed to dictate what happened to my body. All I have is the ability to choose what happens now, what I share or don't share, who I do that with and how I do that.

This questionnaire is a violation of me and my ability to dictate what happens to me and how and when. Please allow me to have the control over my body that was taken away from me. Please don't continue that violation. Please allow me to make the judgments that impact me for myself.

I understand that you are hearing from "experts" in the field today and they are providing testimony as to their opinions, but I wonder if you've considered those that will be most impacted by this matter are not those experts. They are people that need a safe place to disclose who they are what they have experienced on their terms, not the governments term. They are those that will not likely come forward to share their voice for a myriad of reasons. This is my fact and my experience and ME and I want the control over who has that information. I'm grateful someone is willing to speak on my behalf and share my side.

* A the request of the House Committee on Health Care, I am willing to allow this statement to be entered into the written record of testimony. However, in order to protect my identity and my family, I have removed certain specific identifiers from the text and used more general terms with respect to such items as age, activities and ailments. I have also made two grammatical corrections that in no way alter the text. It is not the specific facts of my age or activities or medical issues that should be the focus, but rather the negative impact that a government mandated questionnaire could have on a person's right to privacy, the negative impact it could have on the crucial existence and development of a trust relationship between a doctor and patient, and the negative impact of an individual's sense of safety, security and mental well-being. In the circumstances where the hard won trust already exists, this questioning could hugely damage it and in the circumstances where it has not yet developed, it could prevent it. And for someone who has been abused and violated, it should be most important to allow them the control over their history and experiences rather than taking even more from them.

There is another aspect of the doctor/patient relationship and the development of trust in that relationship that I feel is very important to convey in addition to the necessity of the trust relationship. There is often a disparity between the self that an abuse victim defines and the "self" that they present to the world. With the controls already in place with medical licensing, the Hippocratic oath and others, it provides abuse survivors with an controlled environment in which to experiment with being their true selves. It's an important part of moving on and developing better coping. When confronted by the questioning in the ACE questionnaire, it would throw me right back into "cover-up" coping, a false presentation of self that can only be detrimental, and lying about the answers, which could result in not obtaining needed medical care.