



February 28th, 2019

House Judiciary Committee

Civil Statutes of Limitations for Child Sexual Abuse

Sarah Robinson, Deputy Director

Thank you for taking testimony on the statute of limitations for civil actions related to child sexual abuse. As Vermont's leading voice on domestic and sexual violence, the Vermont Network works to promote policies that support victims and survivors of violence to thrive and live lives free from violence.

The Vermont Network strongly supports H. 330 as proposed. Compared with criminal processes, civil actions have the potential to provide even more meaningful and material justice to victims of child sexual abuse. While criminal justice processes are designed to focus on individual culpability related to specific acts, civil actions can provide a mechanism for broader accountability. Importantly, civil actions provide an opportunity to seek damages from individuals who caused them harm as well as institutions that were entrusted with keeping children safe. Civil actions have the potential to not only provide accountability for victims but to encourage institutional reforms that can prevent further or future abuse from occurring.

The economic toll of child sexual abuse is immense. Allowing victims to bring civil actions against individuals and institutions shifts the cost and burden of abuse from the victim to those who caused harm. A recent study highlighted that the annual cost of child sexual abuse in the United States is \$9.3 billion. The average lifetime cost of child sexual abuse for women is \$283,000.¹ These economic costs are the result of lifetime impacts that can include lost economic productivity, and higher rates of health and mental health problems.

The current 6-year statute of limitations for civil actions related to child sexual abuse sets forth a timeline that has no relation to the dynamics of child sexual abuse or the challenges that victims face in coming forward. As we have outlined for this committee in testimony on criminal statutes of limitations, lifting these limits expands victims' ability to seek healing and justice. Many victims – especially victims of crimes which are sexual in nature – experience significant barriers to coming forward. Victims of child sexual abuse often struggle with shame and mistrust of investigative or judicial processes.

We thank the Committee for your consideration, and look forward to working with members on this bill as it progresses.

¹ The Economic Burden of Child Sexual Abuse in the United States. Child Abuse Neglect, May 2018, p. 413-422