



April 18th, 2019

Senate 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 passed by the House. 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 earnings, and higher rates of health and mental health problems.

The 6-year discovery timeline in the current civil statute of limitations sets forth a timeline that has no relation to the dynamics of child sexual abuse or the challenges that victims face in coming forward. According to the National Institute of Justice, among children who are sexually abused, three-quarters of child victims are abused by someone who is well-known to them.² Even after the impacts of harm have been identified, it may take many years before a victim decides that legal options can and should be pursued. Victims of child sexual abuse often struggle with shame as well as mistrust of investigative or judicial processes. Expanding limits on statutes of limitations – especially for crimes that are sexual in nature - expands victims' ability to seek healing and justice.

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

² Child and Adolescent Victimization in America: Prevalence and Implications, National Institute of Justice