

Dear House Committee on a Human Services,

I started out my life in the St Joseph's Orphanage in Burlington. I was one of the lucky ones - adopted only months after my arrival. In addition to being adopted myself, I worked for DCF - family services for 6 yrs. I have also been a licensed foster parent for 21 years and adopted my children from foster care. I have 10 yrs correctional experience including working in jails for 5 yrs. All of these experiences combined have brought me to this place of advocating to you for those who- to this day- have no real voice.

So many who spent time in St Joseph's orphanage have scars - some we can't see and some are so clearly visible that one is left wondering how the abuse could've been hidden so long from the public's eye. The reports were made, repeatedly. Even as recent as the 1990's their lawsuit regarding the abuse was really not taken seriously and once again evidence that was available- was hidden.

The reason the Buzz feed writer Christine Kenneally from Australia chose that orphanage and the reason we now all believe the abuse happened is because out of all those orphanages she researched in the US and abroad, the one in Burlington Vt had in her words "so much documentation". (Darren Perron 2018 WCAX). It took her 4 yrs to get through it all and talk to witnesses and write her story. But it's not a story is it? It's history. The history of people in our community. And we can choose to learn from it or continue to risk repeating it.

Abuse of children is not unique to catholic institutions. It's not something that's an isolated incident or even isolated to one period of time. The important thing is to discover it where it exists and prevent it from recurring and heal families and to be sure that in the process of protecting, the protection itself doesn't cause more harm and doesn't see abuse where it isn't.

The people in the child protection system are only as good as the resources, laws and policies and procedures and checks and balances around them ensure them to be. We are a small state. We are a trusting state. All humans are fallible and we can not trust blindly. We can not say we have a true child protection system if we don't have a mechanism in place that checks to see if the system is effective.

I think some reforms have been made in recent years that are great but I think we have far to go and this Bill will be a HUGE step in the right direction. The anonymity and impartial review are the greatest reasons for having this entity developed. We need this because of what foster parents, birth parents and employees currently CAN'T say - even here- to convince you how badly this is needed. You have the power to change that and give the silent a voice. You can give the suffering a voice.

Nationally they find 30-50% of foster parents last less than 1 yr. Likewise, turn-over of SW I believe is less than 6 yrs and I think in Vt it's probably less than that. We should be asking why? I think part of the reason is a real sense of powerlessness to fix the systemic problems they see every day but they have no where to safely report them and no hope things will improve.

Why do we as a culture choose to put our head in the sand for 50-100 yrs until the damage is so horrific and the evidence is so great all we are left to say is "that's horrible but it's too late to do

anything about it". That's not good enough for all the orphans of St Joseph's, and it's not good enough for Vt children and families today. Lets learn from these experiences and assure the protection of children today and in the future. Let those who have suffered and bravely told their stories have that mean something-To mean that you care enough to choose to do better.

As a 27 yr state employee I'm fully aware of the pension discussions and the idea not to start new programs. I think it was Senator Pollina who said something like, if we continue to kick the can down the road the costs will rise if some of these things are not addressed. In my opinion, this is one of those things. I see the end results of trauma every day in Corrections. Our jails are filled with trauma survivors. Nationally, it's said that 70% of those incarcerated are former foster children and I saw this prevalence myself. And 20,000-30,000 children a yr in the US leave foster care with no family. So many of those end up homeless, on welfare, drop out of high school, suffer mental health issues, medical issues we now know scientifically are created or exacerbated by childhood trauma and chronic stress. The cost of doing nothing new, in this case, is far too high.

If our current system truly worked we wouldn't have 3-4 generations of children in foster care. We wouldn't have mass incarceration of former foster children, nor addiction running rampant as trauma survivors self medicate. We aren't successfully healing families. We are failing children and families and paying the price both economically and morally but the greatest atrocity is we aren't even willing to look at it. We continue to trust blindly when history tells us over and over not to even trust even the most holy of people without checks and balances. This is at least the 3rd time I've given testimony on this subject. I want it to be my last.

I don't want any more children silenced either physically or metaphorically by not having Govt think their welfare is important enough to insist on having someone investigating cases who is unbiased, that can finally allow for anonymous reporting and who can do so in a way to be collaborative and non-threatening so what's really going on can be willingly uncovered by all and no one is fearful to talk about what needs to be addressed so meaningful solutions can be sought and Vermont can be a place where all of its residents thrive and Vermont as a whole, can truly prosper.

Feel free to reach back out with any follow up questions you may have.

Amy Anderson