

The Legislative House Judiciary Meeting April 23, 2021

Good Afternoon, my name is Brenda Hannon. We are very grateful to be a part of this Legislative process and for you picking up the S.99 bill so quickly.

The Voices of St. Joseph's Orphanage appreciates you giving your time to listen to us and support our goal of changing the Statute of Limitations for Physical Abuse suffered at institutions. This bill will mean so much to all of us and will help in our healing process to know this statute can no longer be used to hide abuse of any kind. By the passing of this bill, we leave behind a legacy to know all our abuse and suffering will have accomplished some good. I'm sure we can all agree to the fact it should be far more important to protect children from abuse than it is to protect those who abuse them.

The Adverse Childhood Experiences that children go through last a lifetime. We, The Voices of St. Joseph's are living testimony as to the damage that ACE's does to the young developing mind. It has affected most of our lives in many negative ways. For most of us that were exposed to ACE's, life continues to be a struggle.

We were innocent children. Because of circumstances beyond our control; born from unwed mothers, divorced parents, financial family hardships, alcohol abusive parents, we were considered EVIL and WORTHLESS and no one wanted or cared about us. That was reinforced to us daily along with sadistic forms of torcher and abuse; sexually, physically and emotionally.

Even those children who were lucky enough to have a parent who paid for them to be there and had visits from those parents did not escape this abuse. They, along with the rest of us were put in closets, sometimes for days; closed in trunks in the attic, made to kneel for hours and then abused further by hitting, punching and kicking us across the floor if we soiled ourselves. The children were conditioned not to tell what was done to them by the nuns, priests or others in control because "God sees and hears everything and he will strike down your parents, brothers, sisters and anyone we told". If a child did say something it was ignored, not believed or they were told "Only in the mind of a child".

You will be hard pressed to find evidence of physical abuse because records of events were very lax. We also were not taken for medical care so no documents exist of the physical trauma that was endured. UVM Medical Center has some scant records on some of us but only back to 1964. In my medical record there is a statement for treatment but no records of what it was for. I am guessing it was for treatment around 1962-63 on my visit to DeGoesbriand ER. I was brought there around that time, because I was bleeding from my nose, ears and mouth from being tied to a chair and refusing to eat peanut butter pudding. They blocked my nose and forced my mouth open, almost breaking my teeth and forced that gray gelatinous dirty dishwater like pudding in my mouth. I spit it out and the nun beat me so hard around my face and head that I was knocked to the floor landing on my head and face with my hands still tied to the chair. I can remember as clear as today the Doctor looking at me and the nun saying “she is just a stupid, clumsy child”. I know he did not believe those injuries came from me hurting myself; but he did not contradict the nun. I was not allowed to say anything. This is only one miniscule example of what occurred to the children there. Multiply that by hundreds of children for a hundred years.

When you schedule a meeting with our group, you will hear individual physical and emotional traumas done to them. Frankly it takes courage to confront the terrors of the past. In casting light on deeply buried trauma, a victim must once again relive the horror of it all over again. More disturbing is having such testimony dismissed time and again. Those abusers and those who let that occur should be held accountable. We know those abusers are no longer alive, but the institutions are still here.

Again, Thank You for listening to us and believing in us. Hearing and Seeing us makes us feel we are worthy and we have value and are making a contribution to so many children today and in the future.