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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

COMMONWEALTH of PENNSYLVANIA

House Democratic Policy Committee Hearing

Statute of Limitations Reform

Thursday, April 23, 2026 | 1:00 p.m.

Representative Nate Davidson

OPENING REMARKS

1:00 p.m.

Rep. Nate Davidson, D-Dauphin, Cumberland

PANEL ONE

1:05 p.m.

**Kathryn Robb, Survivor/Advocate, National Director
*Children's Justice Campaign***

Lara St. John, Survivor/Advocate

Q & A with Legislators

PANEL TWO

1:30 p.m.

**Gabriella Romeo, Public Policy Director
*Pennsylvania Coalition to Advance Respect (PCAR)***

**Andrea Levy, Legal Director
*PCAR Sexual Violence Assistance Project***

Q & A with Legislators

PANEL THREE

1:55 p.m.

**Jennie Noll, Ph.D., Executive Director, Professor of Psychology
*Mount Hope Family Center, University of Rochester***

**Marci A. Hamilton, Professor of Practice
*University of Pennsylvania***

Q & A with Legislators



TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF PENNSYLVANIA HOUSE BILLS 462 AND 464

House Policy Committee

April 23, 2026

POSITION: FAVORABLE

Submitted by: Children's Justice Campaign at ENOUGH ABUSE®

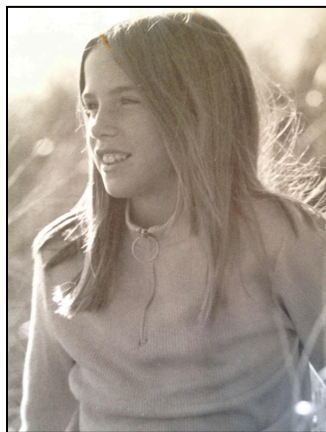
Dear Chairman Bizzarro, Representative Davidson, and members of the Policy Committee,

I am Kathryn Robb, National Director of the Children's Justice Campaign at Enough Abuse®. As a lawyer, legislative advocate, national expert, and survivor of childhood sexual abuse, I am submitting this testimony to express our organization's strong support for House Bills 462 and 464.

This legislation would propose an amendment to allow the Legislature to revive time-barred civil claims involving a sexual offense against a minor. House Bills 462 and 464 clarify that the Legislature would be authorized to revive lapsed rights or remedies, empowering survivors to seek justice and reinforcing Pennsylvania's place in the fight against sexual abuse.

One Girl's Story - Kathryn

When I was a little girl, a family member would slip into my bedroom under the cover of darkness and assault me. It began when I was eight. I would wake to the presence of his body, to something I could not name but immediately understood was wrong. The assaults continued for years. What followed were not just childhood symptoms—sleeplessness, anxiety, a persistent sense of dread—but a pattern that embedded itself far deeper.



What the law often fails to recognize is this: the abuse did not end when the acts stopped. It lives on—night after night, relationship after relationship, decade after decade.

This is not anecdotal; it is diagnostic. Trauma from child sexual abuse does not adhere to a clock. It disrupts development, distorts memory processing, and delays disclosure—often for decades. Survivors frequently cannot name, confront, or act on what happened to them until long after any traditional legal deadline has expired.

And yet, the law has historically treated these claims as if time itself cures them.



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That assumption is not just outdated—it is empirically wrong. When statutes of limitations close courthouse doors before survivors are even capable of coming forward, the legal system is not preserving fairness; it is institutionalizing impunity. It shields those who caused harm and, just as critically, those institutions that enabled or concealed it.

Public policy cannot rest on a premise that contradicts both science and lived reality. A justice system that ignores how trauma operates is not neutral—it is mis-calibrated. And the failure to open up the courtroom doors endangers children.

This is why jurisdictions across the country are reexamining statutes of limitations for child sexual abuse and investing in trauma-informed judicial education. These reforms are not about weakening due process; they are about aligning it with reality—ensuring that access to justice is not extinguished before it can meaningfully exist.

Trauma does not expire. A just legal system should not pretend that it does.

How This Amendment Benefits the Common Good

Statutes of limitations (“SOLs”) are laws that set time limits for filing lawsuits. They are arbitrary deadlines established by legislative bodies. SOLs make sense for most civil wrongs; however, they are not appropriate for child sexual abuse claims, where young victims are often silenced by perpetrators for years or decades after reaching adulthood. Trauma frequently delays disclosure, and once the SOL expires, survivors are barred from court regardless of the merits of their claims—effectively silencing them and allowing abusers to escape accountability.



HOW REVIVAL LAWS PROTECT CHILDREN

- 1 Shields Children from Future Abuse**
by identifying hidden child predators and institutions that endanger children
7% of offenders sampled in a 1995 study committed offenses against forty-one to 450 children, and the longest time between offense and conviction was thirty-six years (Elliott et al. 1995).
- 2 It transfers the cost of abuse**
from victims and taxpayers to bad actors
The estimated lifetime cost to society from United States child sex abuse cases that occurred in 2015 is \$9.3 billion (Letourneau et al. 2018).
- 3 It prevents further abuse by educating the public**
educating parents, grandparents, guardians, and the public on the extent of the CSA problem
- 4 Forces Institutional Change**
Institutions are incentivized to adopt safer child protection policies, procedures, training, and responses.

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Childhood Sexual Abuse is Widespread

Childhood sexual abuse is not a rare occurrence; it is a crisis in our communities that demands immediate attention. Approximately **1 in 8 children will experience sexual abuse before their 18th birthday**. These are not just numbers; they are real children, our children, whose lives are forever altered by this trauma.



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About 1 in 8
children will be
sexually
abused before
their 18th
birthday*¹



*Without effective prevention techniques. Includes contact abuse only.

About 1 in 4 girls
and 1 in 10 boys
will be sexually
abused before
they turn 18*²



*Without effective prevention techniques. Includes contact abuse only.

1. Finkelhor, Turner, and Colburn. "The prevalence of child sexual abuse with online sexual abuse added," *Child Abuse & Neglect*, Volume 149, 2024, 106634, ISSN 0145-2134. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2024.106634>.
2. Center for Violence Prevention Research. (2024, Nov. 15). "Literature review on prevention of child sexual abuse". www.scienceofviolence.org.

The Long-Term Impacts of Abuse

The effects of childhood sexual abuse are severe and long-lasting, impacting survivors physically, psychologically, and socially. Studies have revealed statistically significant correlations between CSA and various **medical issues**, including gynecological problems, chronic pain, sleeping disorders, and obesity. The **sexual health** of survivors is also compromised, with increased risks of adult sexual revictimization, adolescent pregnancy, and higher rates of HIV positivity among men who have sex with men. Furthermore, the **psychological** toll is profound, with survivors reporting higher levels of anxiety, depression, suicidal ideation and behavior, suicide attempts, eating disorders, non-epileptic seizures, fear, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).¹ These devastating impacts underscore the urgent need to address the trauma of CSA and provide avenues for healing and justice.

Why Survivors Stay Silent

The trauma associated with childhood sexual abuse creates significant barriers to reporting. Tragically, studies show that around 44.9% of male child sex abuse victims and 25.4% of female CSA victims who eventually **disclose their abuse** do so **more than twenty years after** it occurred.² Furthermore, it is estimated that a staggering 70–95% of CSA victims never report their abuse to the police.³ This silence is not a reflection of a lack of courage or credibility but rather the profound psychological impact of abuse, including the deep-seated fear, shame, and manipulation tactics employed by perpetrators and their enablers. Pennsylvania's current SOLs fail to account for these very real obstacles, effectively silencing survivors and shielding

¹ Nagtegaal, Maria H, and Cyril Boonmann. "Child Sexual Abuse and Problems Reported by Survivors of CSA: A Meta-Review." *Journal of child sexual abuse* vol. 31,2 (2022): 147-176. doi:10.1080/10538712.2021.1985673.

² O'Leary, Patrick J, and James Barber. "Gender differences in silencing following childhood sexual abuse." *Journal of child sexual abuse* vol. 17,2 (2008): 133-43. doi:10.1080/10538710801916416.

³ Finkelhor, David, et al. "Sexually Assaulted Children: National Estimates and Characteristics." *National Incidence Studies of Missing, Abducted, Runaway, and Thrownaway Children*, Office of Justice Programs, Aug. 2008, www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/ojdp/214383.pdf.



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perpetrators from accountability. It perpetuates a system where justice is often unattainable for those who need it most.

Justice Through Opening Revival Windows

By allowing the Legislature to open a revival window, House Bills 462 and 464 empower survivors to come forward on their own terms whenever they are ready. Even decades later, survivors can tell their stories, name their abusers, and expose patterns of misconduct that may still be occurring. This reform challenges the impunity that allows offenders to evade accountability, ensures that perpetrators can be held responsible for serious harm, and sends a clear message that those entrusted with the care of children must protect them, act transparently, and take responsibility if they fail. In doing so, House Bills 462 and 464 not only deliver justice to survivors but also strengthen public safety, restores trust in institutions, and, most importantly, helps prevent future abuse.

Pennsylvania Should Join the National Movement

Across the United States, there is a growing recognition that survivors of childhood sexual abuse deserve the opportunity to seek justice, even if the SOLs on their claims have expired. To date, **thirty-one states and three territories have enacted revival or window laws** to allow expired CSA claims to proceed, including states like Arkansas, California, Louisiana, Maryland, and Vermont, reflecting broad, bipartisan support for this kind of reform.

Importantly, some states have also pursued constitutional amendments to ensure these revival efforts are legally sound. **Virginia amended its constitution** to permit retroactive civil legislation for intentional torts against minors, paving the way for its revival of CSA claims. Utah, Colorado, Alabama, Missouri, and Texas introduced constitutional amendments to allow the revival of time-barred civil claims involving CSA. These efforts reflect a broader national movement toward constitutional clarity, legislative empowerment, and survivor-centered justice.



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**20 states, 2 territories,
and the federal gov.
have eliminated the civil
SOL for some or all CSA
claims**

AR, AK, AZ, CA, CO, CT, DE, FL, IL,
LA, ME, MD, MN, NE, NV, NH, OR, UT,
VT, WA, Fed, NMI, & Guam

23

JURISDICTIONS

**31 states and 3
territories have
revival/window
legislation for expired
civil CSA claims**

AL, AZ, AR, CA, CO*, CT, DE, GA, HI, IN, IA, KS,
KY*, LA, ME*, MD, MA, MI, MN, MT, NC, NH*,
NV, NJ, NY, OH, OR, RI, UT*, VT, WV, DC, NMI,
& Guam

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JURISDICTIONS

Conclusion

In conclusion, we urge this committee to support House Bills 462 and 464. By passing this bill, Pennsylvania can help survivors of child sexual abuse heal by removing legal barriers that silence them and protect sexual predators and other bad actors. Moreover, child sexual abuse survivors' primary purpose in coming forward is to protect children in the future. Let us prioritize the well-being of survivors, take a step toward breaking the cycle of trauma, and protect our children now and in the future by lifting the dangerous contractual veil of secrecy.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have questions regarding this legislation or if we can be of assistance in any other way.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathryn Robb, Esq.
National Director
Children's Justice Campaign at ENOUGH ABUSE®

Jessica Schidlow, Esq.
Senior Policy Analyst & Legislative Counsel
Children's Justice Campaign at ENOUGH
ABUSE®

Thank you for having me back to speak here again. My name is Lara St. John. I am a classical violinist. I began playing the instrument when I was two. At four, I made my debut as a soloist with orchestra, and at the age of nine, I toured for the first time in Europe.

When I was 13, I was accepted into the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia. It's one of the most famous conservatories in the world. It's a full-scholarship school and harder to get into than Harvard. It was incredibly exciting for me, and my brother was also admitted. We were the first brother and sister ever to attend the school.

We were from a lower-income family in a small city in Canada, and our parents decided to leave us in Philadelphia under the care of the institute.

It's customary at the top conservatories for students to study with a master one on one, in a private setting. Lessons take place behind closed doors, usually in a windowless studio. The master has almost complete control over the activities of the student and fills a larger-than-life place in the student's life.

I was assigned to be taught by a famous violin professor named Jascha Brodsky, but my excitement quickly turned to fear. He would touch me in unpleasant ways and then talk about what a shame it would be if my brother and I had to leave the school. I soon understood that I had to please him with more than just my playing or he would have us both expelled.

By the end of my first year, the forced touching escalated to rape. I was a 14-year-old virgin. He was 78.

I was terrified and had no idea what to do. I didn't tell anyone – not even my brother. I couldn't stand the idea that I might somehow be responsible for getting him expelled from the school.

At one point I realized I needed to buy a pregnancy test. But we never had much spending money. So I was left with nothing to spend on food for the rest of the week.

I was so angry that, even though I continued to take my lessons, I would play my violin in the corner and then rush out, slamming the door when I left. I stopped caring about anything.

In my second year, I couldn't take it anymore. I couldn't keep seeing my rapist every week. With two older friends, I went to see the dean of the school. I told him most of the story. But I left out the rape. I was too ashamed, and I couldn't deal with my friends knowing the whole truth.

The response we got made everything worse. The dean made fun of me and asked what I expected him to do. Changing teachers was not considered acceptable at Curtis. When one of my friends said we'd go to the police if they refused to change my teacher, the dean asked who we thought the police would believe – some kid, or a distinguished faculty member?

Eventually, Curtis allowed me to change teachers. But Brodsky was never punished or even given a warning. He kept teaching without any consequence until his death many years later. I kept seeing him at the school, and I ended up attempting suicide. After that, I understood I had to leave Curtis. I felt I couldn't talk to anyone about what I was going through. Getting away was the only solution I could think of.

I graduated from Curtis at age 17 and signed up for a music exchange program in the Soviet Union.

In time, I became a successful soloist. I have performed with most of the major orchestras in the world; I started my own record company; I have been profiled in newspapers, magazines and on TV; I own a multimillion dollar violin and have received many awards and honors.

But I was never really able to enjoy any of this success. My life since Curtis has been almost entirely about survival.

I reported my abuse to Curtis as a child in 1986 and then again in 1995. I wrote a nine-page letter to the school's leadership in 2013 after the retired dean started to describe himself as a protector of children in media interviews. At that point, Curtis commissioned a very thin investigation that was designed to protect itself from any liability for its failures.

When I decided I could probably get by without ever having to play another note on my violin, that's when I finally went public. That was in 2019, in the Philadelphia Inquirer. I finally felt secure enough to tell my story. Until then, it seemed too risky and frightening to come forward publicly.

The story became front-page news. And even then, Curtis responded by engaging in a campaign of deception and avoidance. Eventually, under pressure from the media, they commissioned an independent report, this time by two former sex crimes prosecutors from the Philadelphia District Attorney's office. In 2020, their law firm, Cozen O'Connor, found that I was entirely credible. And it found many other examples of children being abused – by my former teacher and others at Curtis.

After the Cozen report, I received a short letter from Curtis saying they were sorry. I haven't heard from them since.

A lot has been taken from me: a more successful, more joyful career, normal intimate relations with my husband. Even though I doubt it is provable, I blame the fact that I miscarried for the last time in 2013 on Curtis and the rage I felt when their dean hypocritically portrayed himself as a savior of children.

I never felt the joy of a first kiss because my rapist stole that from me.

The abuse I went through caused severe post-traumatic stress disorder, which I still suffer from. It was not until my late 30s that I was able to maintain a successful life partnership with a man. I never succeeded at having children.

It cost me a lot to tell the world my story in 2019, but it came too late for any sort of legal recourse. I lost my right to pursue any legal action decades before I felt ready to consider doing so.

In spite of all I've been through, I don't get the impression that much has really changed.

Since I went public, I've heard from more than a thousand women (and a few men) who have had similar experiences. I've been in touch with many and ended up filming a documentary on the subject of sexual abuse in the classical music world. The finished film premiered in February at the Santa Barbara Film Festival.

I am one of a legion of child victims of sexual abuse in classical music who want justice and want change. None of us will have true closure from what happened to us decades ago until we can pursue true justice in court. Until that happens, schools, including Curtis, will be able to keep ignoring me and other victims, placing their reputations above the safety of the students they are supposed to be nurturing.

In the course of researching my documentary, I found that child abuse at institutions like Curtis is commonplace around the world. The film goes into detail on seven different rape cases at institutions in Pennsylvania, California, Texas, Canada, England and Holland. The harm done led to suicide in multiple instances. And these examples represent a small fraction of the institutions protecting abusers from the consequences of their abuse. This is a truly global problem that has not received the attention of similar problems in the Catholic Church or the Boy Scouts.

We need to be strong enough to discuss this difficult subject directly. We need to do everything we can to put a stop to this criminal activity. There are more than a million schoolchildren in the state of Pennsylvania who take music lessons, and millions more enrolled in similar programs of all kinds. We need to protect those children. And we can do it by holding the abusers and their enablers responsible for their crimes.

This is a chance for Pennsylvania, the state that led the American Revolution, to take the lead again – by enabling the survivors of sexual abuse to speak out and bring their abusers to justice.

It's time to end the statute of limitations for child sex abuse. It protects criminals who are fully aware that their victims are unlikely to accuse them for many years to come. These predators do not deserve to be protected by the law.

Please do what is needed to protect our children instead.

Thank you.



Pennsylvania Coalition to
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a division of respect together

Pennsylvania Coalition to Advance Respect

Testimony presented at House Democratic Policy Committee Public Hearing on Statute of Limitations

Gabriella Romeo, Public Policy Director

Andrea Levy, Legal Director

April 23, 2026

Introduction

We are here to talk about keeping our communities safe and to highlight the needs of adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse. Statute of limitations reform for adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse has long been a core priority of our organization.

Thank you for convening this public hearing on the statute of limitations and for the opportunity to address this critically important issue. We also want to begin by expressing deep gratitude to the courageous survivors who are here today sharing their experiences.

The Pennsylvania Coalition to Advance Respect (PCAR), a division of Respect Together, is the Commonwealth's statewide anti-sexual violence coalition. Founded in 1975, we support 47 rape crisis centers serving all 67 counties of Pennsylvania. Each year, we serve approximately 30,000 individuals through counseling, advocacy, legal services, medical accompaniment, and prevention education.

Our work is driven by survivors and informed by the expertise of rape crisis center advocates across the Commonwealth.

History of SOL in PA

Pennsylvania has spent decades grappling with the need to reform its statute of limitations for survivors of sexual violence. For nearly twenty years, survivors, rape crisis centers, and advocates have pushed for changes that reflect the realities of trauma and delayed disclosure.

Statutes of limitations are legal deadlines for filing criminal charges or civil claims. While these deadlines vary based on complex factors, for many survivors of childhood sexual abuse, those deadlines expired long before they were able to come forward.

Through no fault of their own, countless survivors were left with no legal pathway to seek justice. Although Pennsylvania has enacted important forward-looking reforms in recent years, those changes did not address individuals whose claims had already expired. As a result, many survivors continue to face locked doors to justice.

This is why a retroactive, or "look-back," window remains essential. It would provide a one-time opportunity for survivors to file civil claims and seek accountability and justice.

The urgency of this reform has been underscored repeatedly through survivor testimony, legislative advocacy, and investigative findings. Multiple Pennsylvania Grand Jury reports over the past two decades have documented widespread child sexual abuse and systemic institutional failures that allowed it to continue. These reports consistently found that even where credible evidence existed—including internal records and admissions—legal action was often impossible because statutes of limitations had expired.

In response, the General Assembly enacted several forward-looking reforms in 2019, including extending criminal and civil statutes of limitations for future cases and strengthening reporting requirements. These were important steps, but they did not provide relief for survivors whose claims were already time-barred.

Since then, efforts to establish a retroactive civil window have advanced and stalled repeatedly due to constitutional debates, procedural barriers, administrative failures, and legislative gridlock. Despite bipartisan recognition of the need for reform, survivors remain without access to justice.

Gaps in current Pennsylvania framework

Multiple Grand Jury reports in Pennsylvania over the past two decades have played a critical role in exposing the scope and systemic nature of child sexual abuse, particularly within trusted institutions. Beginning with the 2005 Grand Jury Report on the Archdiocese of Philadelphia and continuing through subsequent reports in 2011, 2016, and the landmark 2018 report examining eight Catholic dioceses, these investigations documented widespread abuse, institutional concealment, and repeated failures to protect children.

These reports made clear that in many cases, credible evidence existed—including internal records and admissions—yet prosecution and civil accountability were barred due to expired statutes of limitations.

While public attention has often focused on abuse within the Catholic Church, the findings also reflect a broader reality: child sexual abuse occurs across many settings, including schools, athletic programs, medical institutions, and community organizations. Across these contexts, systems failed to protect children, and survivors were left without recourse.

The 2018 Grand Jury report issued four key recommendations:

1. Eliminate the criminal statute of limitations for child sexual abuse
2. Create a two-year retroactive civil “window”
3. Strengthen penalties for failure to report abuse
4. Prohibit non-disclosure agreements that prevent reporting to law enforcement

While three of these recommendations have been implemented, the retroactive civil window remains unfulfilled.

Survivors deserve to have every tool to seek justice available to them. Statute of limitations reform—particularly the creation of a retroactive civil window—is essential to ensuring survivors of sexual violence have meaningful access to justice. This tool belongs in their toolbox.

Trauma, Disclosure, and Barriers to Justice

High-profile cases in Pennsylvania further illustrate this pattern and the long-term harm caused when abuse goes unaddressed. Across all these contexts, the findings have been consistent: abuse was often enabled by systems that failed to act, and survivors were left without recourse due to expired legal timelines. Each of these reports has called on the legislature to enact a retroactive civil window, recognizing that without it, many survivors will never have the opportunity to seek justice or hold those responsible accountable.

Trauma is not linear, and survivors do not process or disclose what happened to them on a predictable timeline. The impact of sexual violence can surface in different ways at different stages of a person's life, often influenced by safety, stability, relationships, and access to support. For many survivors, understanding or naming their experience may take years or even decades.

These realities are compounded when abuse occurs in the context of significant power imbalances, particularly when children are harmed by trusted adults or authority figures. In those situations, children are often especially vulnerable—dependent on the very individuals or institutions that may be causing harm. Fear, confusion, manipulation, and threats can all play a role in silencing disclosure, making it even more difficult for survivors to come forward until long after the abuse has occurred.

Sexual violence is widespread and often begins early in life, with many survivors not coming forward until years or even decades later. Research and frontline advocacy consistently show that delayed disclosure is not the exception—it is the norm. The neurobiology of trauma, combined with fear, stigma, power dynamics, and systemic barriers, shapes how and when survivors are able to process what happened and seek help. Yet, current statutes impose rigid and arbitrary deadlines that fail to reflect these realities, effectively shutting survivors out of the civil justice system before they are ready or able to come forward.

These limitations function as barriers to justice rather than pathways to it. In practice, they can shield those who caused harm from accountability, despite the fact that child sexual abuse has always been a crime. For decades, trusted adults and institutions knowingly endangered children and, in some cases, concealed abuse. Child sexual abuse is the result of a broader systemic failure to protect children, and it is our responsibility to respond to survivors' needs after that failure. Survivors deserve support, acceptance, and a meaningful pathway to justice—and a retroactive window is a critical tool to provide that opportunity.

Reforming the statute of limitations, including establishing a retroactive window, is about fairness, accountability, and access to justice. These reforms do not remove due process protections—those accused will still have the full opportunity to defend themselves in court. Instead, they remove an inequitable procedural barrier that has long prevented survivors from seeking justice. Survivors deserve options, whether through civil litigation, financial compensation, or simply the opportunity to have their experiences acknowledged and documented.

General legal hurdles survivors face

Even when legal rights exist in theory, survivors often face significant barriers in practice, including limited access to trauma-informed legal services. Navigating the civil justice system can be complex and retraumatizing without specialized support.

Many survivors—particularly those in rural or underserved communities—do not have access to attorneys trained in trauma-informed practice. As a result, they may be unable to understand their rights, evaluate legal options, or sustain participation in legal processes.

Without these services, survivors are often left to navigate complicated procedures, evidentiary requirements, and emotionally difficult processes on their own, which can discourage or entirely deter them from seeking justice. This gap in access effectively reinforces inequities within the legal system, where the ability to pursue accountability depends not only on the existence of legal rights, but also on the availability of appropriate support to exercise them. Ensuring access to trauma-informed legal representation is therefore not only a matter of service delivery, but a fundamental access-to-justice issue that directly impacts whether survivors can realistically engage with the legal system at all.

Survivors also often lack access to the basic legal knowledge needed to understand whether and how the law applies to their specific situation. Sexual violence cases involve complex legal frameworks, and determining whether a claim is viable requires more than general information—it requires specialized legal analysis tailored to the facts of a particular case. Survivors must often navigate questions about applicable statutes of limitations, evidentiary standards, institutional liability, and procedural requirements without the training or resources to fully interpret them. Without this foundational understanding, many survivors are unable to even identify that they may have a potential civil claim.

This gap in legal understanding has a direct impact on a survivor's ability to seek civil remedies. Specialized legal guidance is often necessary to assess how the law applies to their experience, how procedural rules may affect their ability to file a claim, and what outcomes may be possible in court. Without that support, survivors may incorrectly assume they have no legal options, miss critical deadlines, or be unable to pursue claims in a way that meets procedural requirements. As a result, the lack of accessible, trauma-informed legal expertise is not just an informational gap—it is a structural barrier that can prevent survivors from ever accessing civil justice at all.

Civil and criminal remedies serve different but complementary purposes in responding to sexual violence, and survivors deserve access to both. Criminal proceedings are brought by the state and focus on determining whether a crime was committed and, if so, imposing punishment such as incarceration or probation. Civil cases, by contrast, are initiated by survivors themselves and focus on accountability, financial restitution, and the opportunity to seek recognition of harm through the court system. Because the burdens of proof, procedures, and

outcomes are different, a criminal case may not move forward or result in a conviction even when a survivor's experience is credible and deeply harmful.

Survivors deserve access to both pathways because each offers a distinct form of justice and validation. Civil remedies allow survivors to pursue accountability directly, seek compensation for the long-term impacts of abuse, and hold both individuals and institutions responsible for their role in enabling harm. Criminal remedies, when available, address public accountability and safety through the justice system. Ensuring access to both options recognizes that no single process can fully meet the needs of all survivors, and that justice must be flexible enough to reflect the varied and complex realities of sexual violence.

Why Civil Remedies Matter

Civil legal remedies are vital for sexual assault survivors because they prioritize survivor agency, offer a lower burden of proof than criminal trials, and provide unique avenues for financial compensation and institutional accountability. Unlike the criminal system, where the state controls the case and the survivor is merely a witness, civil litigation allows the survivor to lead the process as the plaintiff.

Civil remedies provide several forms of justice and support that the criminal system often cannot deliver:

1. Financial Recovery and Stability

Survivors can seek monetary damages to cover the extensive costs associated with assault that accumulates throughout their lives, which the criminal system is not designed to address. This includes:

- **Medical and therapeutic expenses:** Coverage for past and future counseling, psychiatric care, and medical bills.
- **Economic losses:** Recovery of lost wages, reduced earning capacity, and educational disruptions.
- **Quality of life:** Compensation for pain, suffering, emotional distress, and permanent psychological injuries like PTSD.

2. Survivor Agency and Empowerment

In a civil case, the survivor is the plaintiff and maintains direct control over the timeline and key decisions, such as whether to settle or go to trial. This autonomy can be a critical step toward healing and reclaiming power.

3. Institutional Accountability and community safety

Civil lawsuits can target not only the individual perpetrator but also **third parties**—such as schools, churches, or workplaces—that failed to prevent the abuse, ignored warning signs, or covered up misconduct. These cases can force organizations to change harmful policies, release internal records, and implement stronger protections for others. The release of institutions' internal records through the discovery process increases public safety. By passing HB464/462 we firmly believe it will bring perpetrators who caused harm out of the shadows, and this is a matter of public safety. We know that

many perpetrators can abuse multiple victims, and we feel that as they continue to maintain anonymity over time, this is a risk for public safety. The retroactive window for victims to seek civil justice will allow the Commonwealth to better protect its communities going forward. It will also demonstrate that PA is serious about protecting children from sexual assault and will leave no stone unturned to do so.

4. Lower Burden of Proof

The legal standard in civil court is a "**preponderance of the evidence**" (more likely than not, or roughly 51%), which is significantly easier to meet than the criminal standard of "beyond a reasonable doubt". This allows survivors to seek justice even if criminal charges were never filed or if the perpetrator was acquitted.

Despite all of these benefits, the civil justice system presents one significant hurdle for many survivors: and that is the current statute of limitations laws. Statutes of Limitations are arbitrary time limits which prevent adult survivors from suing, especially when trauma has delayed their ability to report or recall the abuse for years or decades. More than 20 states have already addressed this issue, but not PA which is why PCAR is here once again standing with survivors and fighting for the passage of HB464/462 to remove this barrier blocking justice for adult survivors and safety for our communities.

Impact of HB 462 and HB 462

Statute of limitations reform and expanded access to civil justice are fundamentally issues of public safety as well as individual redress. While healing is a critical part of survivors' journeys, these reforms also serve a broader protective function for communities. Individuals who commit abuse often do so repeatedly, and institutions that enabled abuse may have concealed patterns of misconduct. Without a pathway forward, these individuals and institutions can remain hidden. When survivors are able to bring civil claims, the discovery process can uncover critical information about patterns of abuse, institutional practices, and systemic failures that allowed harm to continue. This process can bring previously hidden conduct to light, reveal connections across cases, and help communities better understand where risks may still exist. In this way, civil litigation strengthens accountability, increases transparency, and helps prevent future harm.

Enacting HB 462 and HB 464 would meaningfully strengthen Pennsylvania's civil justice framework by removing longstanding procedural barriers that have prevented many survivors from pursuing claims. By expanding or clarifying access to civil remedies, these bills help address the reality that survivors often face legal "hurdles" rooted in rigid timelines and outdated assumptions about when a person should be able to come forward. In doing so, they would make the civil justice system more accessible and more responsive to the lived realities of trauma, including delayed disclosure and the non-linear nature of healing.

Beyond the legal changes themselves, HB 462 and HB 464 would also carry important symbolic and practical significance by affirming that Pennsylvania recognizes survivors' experiences and is committed to their wellbeing. By opening clearer pathways to civil justice, the Commonwealth would be signaling that survivors are believed, supported, and entitled to meaningful avenues for accountability. This shift not only improves access to justice, but also reinforces that survivors' needs and experiences are a priority within the state's legal system.

Carrying forward the voices of survivors

At the end of March, PCAR had the opportunity to share space with approximately 10 survivors that are impacted by statute of limitations reform.. For two hours, we heard directly from survivors about their lived experiences, admired their resilience, and understood the importance of showing up for survivors. It was not possible for all of those survivors to share this space with us today and it would be impossible for all Pennsylvania survivors to join us too. Please know that as we share our remarks today, we carry their voices forward.

Conclusion

Pennsylvania has already been the subject of major Attorney General investigations that documented widespread child sexual abuse and made clear recommendations for reform. Despite this, the Commonwealth has still not fully implemented one of the most critical recommendations: the creation of a retroactive civil window.

These findings are well-documented and reflect systemic failures that demand accountability. Other states have already moved forward with similar reforms, recognizing that survivors deserve meaningful access to justice.

The question before us is not whether the harm occurred—it is how long survivors will continue to be denied the opportunity to seek accountability and transparency.

Whether through statutory reform or a constitutional amendment, we support any viable pathway that ensures survivors are no longer barred from the civil justice system by arbitrary time limits.

What matters most is that Pennsylvania finally moves forward with meaningful reform that reflects the realities of trauma, strengthens public safety, and ensures survivors have a real opportunity to be heard.



TO: Honorable Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee & Senate State Government Committee

FROM: Jennie Noll, PhD; Executive Director, Mt Hope Family Center & Professor of Psychology, University of Rochester

RE: HB462/HB464

DATE: 23 April 2026

Dear Honorable Members of the Senate Judiciary and State Government Committees,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony regarding PA HB462/HB464. This legislation represents a critical avenue towards aligning Pennsylvania law with the realities of child sexual abuse (CSA). The science is clear: CSA is widespread, uniquely silencing, and very often it is not disclosed until decades after it occurs. The proposed revival window legislation brings the law into alignment with science by recognizing the lifelong psychological, biological, and economic harms of CSA, finally relieving survivors of the burden of carrying those harms alone.

To briefly situate my expertise, I am a leading expert in CSA research and prevention. I serve as Principal Investigator of the longest-spanning, most rigorous longitudinal study of effects of CSA on health, stress, and biology ever conducted, and led two National Institutes of Health Centers of Excellence in Child Maltreatment Prevention. I was recruited to Pennsylvania State University in 2013 in the wake of the Sandusky scandal. I spent a decade leading the Safe & Healthy Communities Initiative in Pennsylvania, the first and only program to ever yield *population*-level reductions in CSA.¹ My goal in this testimony is to use my expertise to support CSA survivors and keep kids safe from the harms of abuse.

1. Child Sexual Abuse is a Public Health Crisis and Causes Economic Strain

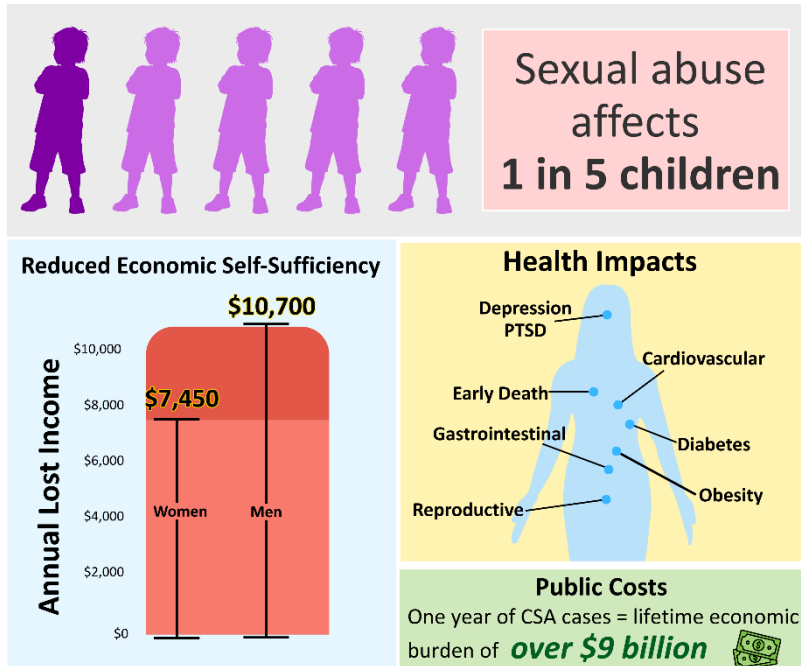
CSA is *alarmingly* common. A recent, exceptionally rigorous meta-analysis² indicates that sexual violence against children affects more than 1 in 4 girls and 1 in 6 boys in the U.S. Additionally, CSA is linked to myriad mental and physical health consequences, including over double the risk for depression, anxiety, and PTSD.^{3,4}

CSA constitutes one of the most pernicious forms of trauma,^{5,6} with an insidious ability to “get under the skin” and affect numerous health outcomes and biological processes. CSA increases risk for poor cardiovascular health, diabetes, gastrointestinal issues, reproductive health problems, and even early death.^{5,7-13} Of all forms of child maltreatment, *CSA exposure carries the*



greatest risk for developing obesity.¹⁴⁻¹⁷

These are not rare, hypothetical, or trivial outcomes; CSA is producing the exact chronic, debilitating, and costly health conditions that significantly strain Medicaid and Medicare budgets.^{18,19} Furthermore, these health impacts are explained by effects of CSA on biological processes, including disruptions in pubertal development,²⁰ cortisol functioning,^{13,21-24} autonomic nervous system activity,²⁵⁻²⁷ inflammation,^{15,28-30} and even epigenetic aging.³¹⁻³³ Thus, the damage from CSA is observed down to the cellular and molecular level.



Furthermore, CSA creates barriers to economic mobility and reduces economic prosperity. CSA is linked to occupational difficulties, unemployment, financial instability, and increased reliance on government assistance.²⁷⁻²⁹ By the time survivors reach their 30s, empirical research shows that CSA survivors, on average, incur annual income losses of \$7,450 for women and \$10,700 for men.³⁷ Abused children are 70% less likely to obtain a 4-year college degree by age 24 compared to non-abused counterparts.³⁸ CSA survivors' socioeconomic challenges may be partially explained by the fact that CSA increases cognitive and executive functioning difficulties,^{20,32,39} impulsivity,^{40,41} teen pregnancy,^{42,43} and substance use.⁴⁴ Survivors' personal financial fragility is often exacerbated by medical debt incurred from CSA-related chronic health conditions.^{8,19} Beyond direct costs to survivors, CSA also confers major public health costs, with researchers estimating *the lifetime economic burden associated with a single year of new CSA cases in the U.S. totals over \$9 billion.*⁴⁵

2. Revival Windows Align the Law with Scientific Evidence

2A. Child Sexual Abuse is Not Typically Reported Immediately

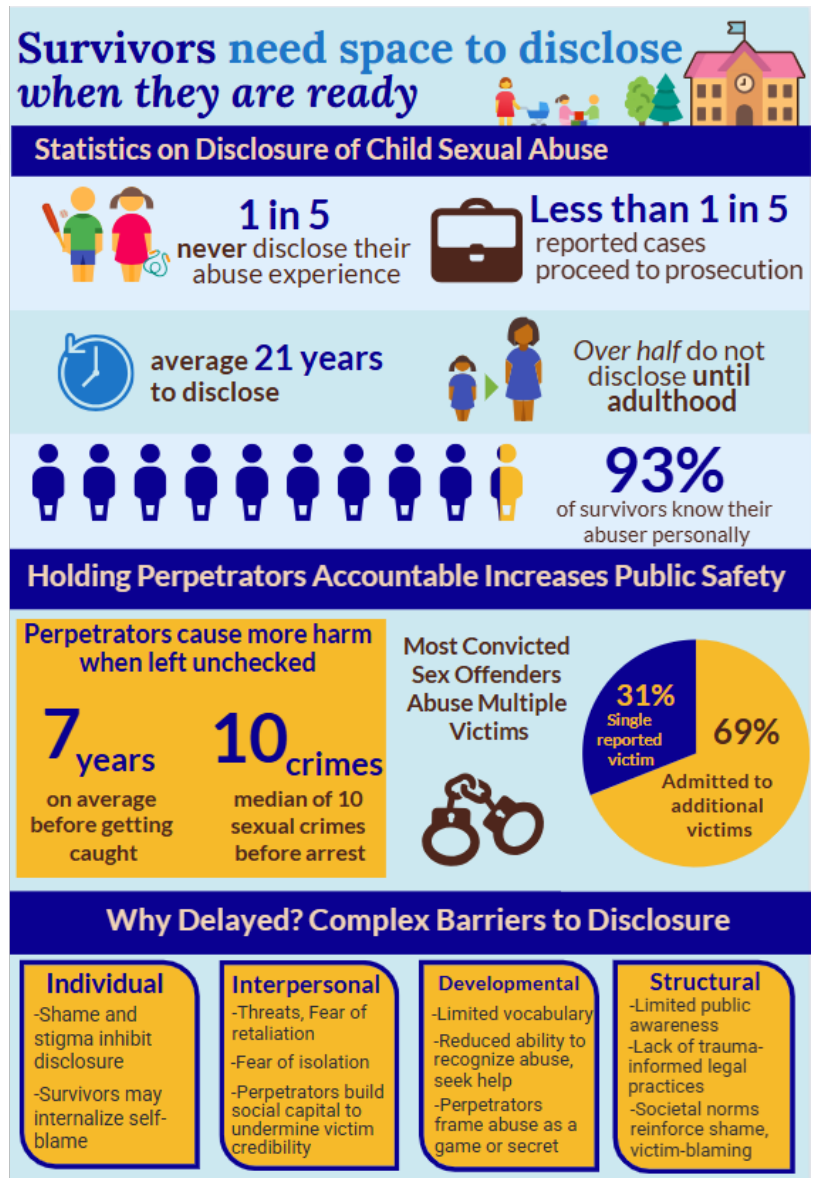
Peer-reviewed studies indicate that over half of CSA survivors do not disclose their abuse until adulthood, with an estimated 1 in 5 *never* disclosing.⁴⁶⁻⁴⁸ One study⁴⁶ of female CSA survivors reported survivors wait an average of 21 years to disclose. Men wait even longer to disclose due to increased stigma.⁴⁹



The reasons behind delayed CSA disclosure are well-documented and span a constellation of individual, interpersonal, and structural barriers.⁴¹ At the individual level, shame and stigma impede disclosure.^{6,50-52} Interpersonally, survivors may fear retaliation and social rejection from loved ones.⁵²⁻⁵⁴ Fear of retaliation is often grounded in concrete threats by perpetrators.⁵⁴⁻⁵⁶ Moreover, 93% of sexually abused individuals know their abuser personally,⁵⁷ amplifying fears that disclosing abuse could be isolating.⁵³ Furthermore, abusers follow a playbook. They may ingratiate themselves with the victim's family or intentionally establish themselves as powerful, respected community members,^{58,59} then leverage this social capital to convince victims they will not be believed.⁶⁰

Abused children also face unique barriers that impede seeking justice within legal timelines. Children's developmental level shapes how they initially interpret and make sense of CSA experiences.^{53,61} For young children in particular, developmental constraints – including limited vocabulary, autobiographical recall, and cognitive capacity to construct a coherent narrative – can delay recognition of abuse.⁶²⁻⁶⁴ Moreover, perpetrators deliberately exploit children's limited understanding in order to manipulate them, such as by misleadingly framing abuse as a game, secret, or an exclusive bond.^{59,65} These dynamics obscure recognition of harm, reinforce self-blame, and delay disclosure of abuse.

At the structural level, limited public awareness, insufficient training for professionals, and the absence of trauma-informed legal practices suppress timely and voluntary disclosure.^{53,66} Feelings of shame are reinforced by societal norms that blame and disbelieve survivors.^{53,65} As such, the research to date emphatically demonstrates there are numerous intersecting barriers to disclosure in the aftermath of CSA. In the meantime, survivors suffer immensely, often bearing the









burden of their abuse alone for decades.

2B. Why Do Child Sexual Abuse Cases Require a Different Legal Approach, Such as Revival Windows?

While traditional legal timelines and statutes of limitations may be suitable for many civil injury cases, the evidence suggests they are often inappropriate for CSA cases. Rigid statutes of limitations can impose unreasonable expectations on abused children. Revival windows help align legal timelines with trauma research and the developmental realities of child abuse, ensuring that survivors who could not have reasonably recognized their abuse or filed a claim earlier are not barred from seeking justice.⁶³

Court System Challenges for Child Witnesses in Abuse Cases	
	<p>Developmental Level Children's developmental level can delay recognition and disclosure of abuse.</p>
	<p>Cognitive Ability Children's verbal and cognitive abilities complicate understanding of court proceedings.</p>
	<p>Stress and Trauma Court involvement can be re-traumatizing and stressful for children.</p>
	<p>Implications These factors highlight the need to restore a sense of safety that allows CSA survivors to seek justice <i>when they are ready</i>.</p>

The structure of legal proceedings can create unique challenges for CSA survivors. Traditional civil litigation timelines often require immediate court involvement in ways that can be developmentally inappropriate for abused children. For example, children's perceived credibility often hinges on their ability to relay detailed and coherent narration of their abuse experiences, despite developmental and trauma-related limits in these domains.^{61,64,67} As a result, child witnesses may face heightened scrutiny, including perceived suggestibility,⁶⁸ competency screenings prior to testimony,⁶³ and may be subjected to developmentally-inappropriate, re-traumatizing cross-examinations.^{69,70} While innovative, trauma-informed strategies^{71,72} to support child witnesses in CSA cases have been recently developed, these approaches were generally unavailable to survivors older than 30-40 years who could most benefit from this legislation.

Consequently, premature court involvement experiences have been associated with additional harm for abused children. Research shows that when CSA survivors testify as children, they often experience significant emotional distress,^{73,74} including exacerbated PTSD symptoms for children who testify more than once.⁷⁵ Younger children involved in court proceedings are more likely to experience psychological difficulties later in life, even after accounting for family stressors and abuse characteristics.⁷⁴ CSA is a traumatic experience that violently strips victims of their agency.⁷⁶ When children are then expected to testify in court before they are developmentally ready, the process can be re-traumatizing^{77,78} Revival windows help restore a sense of agency by allowing CSA survivors to disclose their experiences and seek justice *when it is safe and developmentally appropriate for them to do so*.



3. The Bottom Line: How Can Revival Window Legislation Like HB462/464 Benefit PA Communities?

Given the profound and lifelong psychological, physical, and economic harms associated with CSA, it is critical for survivors to have the opportunity to pursue justice through the civil courts. HB462/464 would bring Pennsylvania law into alignment with developmental and trauma research demonstrating that many CSA survivors are often unable to recognize or safely disclose abuse until decades after it occurs. This legislation is a crucial step toward holding perpetrators and institutions in Pennsylvania⁷⁹ accountable and strengthening public safety.

This reform would also align Pennsylvania with states such as North Carolina, Maryland, Arkansas, New Jersey, and Louisiana that have enacted similar revival window legislation.⁸⁰ In these five states alone, revival windows have enabled at least 1,702 survivors who were sexually abused as children to come forward and pursue civil claims.⁸⁰ Pennsylvania legislators should join other states in passing legislation that aligns legal timelines with the developmental realities of CSA, promotes accountability for abusers, and ensures survivors have the opportunity to seek justice through the courts.

Finally, a child is sexually abused every nine minutes in the United States, meaning that at least one new child was victimized in the time it took to read this statement.⁸¹ Children cannot wait any longer for the law to catch up with the science.

Sincerely,

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TO: Policy Committee of the House Democratic Caucus
FROM: Prof. Marci A. Hamilton
RE: Constitutionality of Child Sex Abuse Window Legislation
DATE: April 23, 2026

Thank you for asking me to testify today regarding the constitutionality of a statutory two-year window that would revive expired civil statutes of limitation (SOLs) for child sex abuse for two years. **I am here today to urge you in the strongest possible terms to reject the need for a constitutional amendment and instead to pass a statutory two-year window via HB 462.**

By way of introduction, I am a leading constitutional law and statute of limitations expert. For twenty-six years, I served as the Paul R. Verkuil Chair in Public Law at Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law. For the last ten years, I have been a Professor of Practice at the University of Pennsylvania where I teach Constitutional Law. I am also the founder of CHILD USA, that leader on legislative statute of limitations reform.

I. Pennsylvania Law Permits a Statutory Window for Child Sex Abuse Victims

Ten years ago, I testified at a hearing organized by Sen. Stewart Greenleaf on the constitutionality of window legislation that a two-year window is constitutional and may be passed via legislation, which is attached. Professor Kermit Roosevelt of the University of Pennsylvania School of Law submitted similar testimony. The law of Pennsylvania has not changed in the intervening years and I stand by my analysis from 2016. Since then, states including Louisiana, Maryland, and North Carolina have passed window revival legislation and their Supreme Courts have upheld it. States like Maine and Colorado have held window legislation unconstitutional, but their state constitutions explicitly banned retroactive legislation unlike the Pennsylvania Constitution.

In summary, the Pennsylvania Constitution does not ban the retroactive revival of an expired civil statute of limitations. It would not be a violation of due process. It is also not a violation of the Remedies Clause, despite the arguments mounted to make that argument. Under Pennsylvania law, the revival of a civil SOL is a mere procedural change that does not trigger vested rights or due process.

The issue arose, because the Catholic bishops' lobbyists argued to lawmakers that a window is unconstitutional. This is something their counterparts in many states have argued. Yet, **Pennsylvania is the only state that accepted their arguments at face value, and for that reason turned away from enacting a statute and toward a constitutional amendment.** It was unnecessary and slowed the process to a grinding halt.

The purpose behind arguing for a constitutional amendment, quite frankly, is to slow down the process and to make it as difficult as possible for victims to get their day in court. In Pennsylvania, the Catholic Conference was particularly fortunate, because not only did their campaign spread out the process over time, given that a constitutional amendment must be passed by both Houses two years in a row, and then go to a referendum, but Gov. Wolf's Secretary of State missed a deadline, which meant that a constitutional amendment has never made it to the referendum stage in ten years.

I am here today to urge you in the strongest possible terms to reject the need for a constitutional amendment and instead to pass a statutory two-year window to finally afford the child sex abuse victims of Pennsylvania the justice they deserve.

II. The Unfair Practical Ramifications of Forcing Window Legislation to Be a Constitutional Amendment

A constitutional amendment requires the passage of identical language in both Houses two years in a row and passage via a referendum. For the victim community, a referendum creates an extraordinary burden. To educate the public about such a referendum would cost, conservatively, about \$9 million. There are no survivor or victims' groups in the Commonwealth who have a war chest that would permit them to turn away from their extremely important work to spend that much on a referendum campaign.

The advent of a constitutional amendment process in the midst of this Commonwealth's efforts to help the victims of child sex abuse also introduced unfortunate politics into what should be a bi-partisan and nonpartisan issue, as the passage of the federal Epstein Files Transparency Act illustrated. Republicans have attempted to tie to a window constitutional amendment a Voter ID amendment. Treating this issue as straightforwardly as possible is what is needed instead, and that means passing HB 462.

Finally, given the facts that (1) the majority of states to address window legislation has upheld it as constitutional, (2) the Pennsylvania Constitution does not have the language that has led to other states holding a window constitutional, and (3) the interest of justice demands immediate action for the victims, I urge Pennsylvania lawmakers to pass a statutory two-year window in 2026 and to let it be tested in the Pennsylvania courts, which I strongly believe, based on my expertise, will uphold the window.

Sincerely,



Marci A. Hamilton
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University of Pennsylvania
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The views expressed herein are my own.