

# **Open letter to the Speaker and the Massachusetts House of Representatives on Statutes of Limitations Reform**

<http://reform-network.net/?p=5169>

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House of Representatives  
Legislative Office Building  
Boston, Massachusetts  
May 25, 2010

Dear Speaker DeLeo and members of the Massachusetts House of Representatives,

I am a member of the Child Victims Voice Coalition of Delaware ([www.childvictimsvoice.com](http://www.childvictimsvoice.com)) and a founding member of the National Survivor Advocates Coalition (<http://www.nsacoalition.org>).

I testified before the Senate and House Judiciary Committees in support of Senate Bill 29 which was signed into Delaware law on July 10, 2007 and have been actively involved in advocating for legislative reform on the state level since 2002 and I strongly urge you to support Massachusetts House bill 1523 which will better protect all the children of the commonwealth.

I have spoken recently on National Public Radio on the importance of giving no accommodation in law to any religious denomination or non-profit institution that does more to enable, shield or protect known sexual predators than to childhood victims of sexual abuse – by anyone.

<http://whyy.org/cms/radiotimes/2010/04/12/holding-clergy-and-church-leaders-legally-accountable-for-child-abuse/>

There simply are no arguments compelling enough to persuade good people to oppose legislation whose goal is to hold sexual predators accountable and allow victims of childhood sexual abuse the access to justice which is their right as citizens.

The sexual exploitation of children is a major epidemic in our United States. One in four girls and one in six boys are sexually abused before the age of 18 whether that abuse is committed by a parent, teacher, doctor, rabbi, priest, nun or stranger.

It is a heinous and reprehensible crime against the body and soul of a child with serious and long lasting effects. Unfortunately, a significant percentage of individuals injured in this way cannot cope with some of these effects and take their own lives. I have met parents whose sons were sexually abused. Those parents lost their sons because their adult children could not “get over it,” could not “get on with their lives” and ended up taking their own lives.

Such crimes are committed by individuals from all segments of society and they all cry out to God for justice.

Cardinal William Keeler of Baltimore, Maryland described sexual abuse as “murder of the soul” and it truly is. It is fitting therefore, that there be no statutes of limitation, criminally or civilly, in regard to the sexual abuse of children, no matter whom the perpetrators may be or what positions they may hold. Child abuse is the act of a coward bent on exercising his or her power and control over a helpless and pliant child.

The egregious and heinous crime that childhood sexual abuse is should propel those of us in public service and church ministry to do all we can to protect our children and hold those accountable who would shelter and protect the sexual predators who would harm them, no matter the cost in institutional reputation or credibility.

**Leaders of religious organizations in a number of states are mounting strong opposition to any changes in states' statutes of limitation regarding the sexual abuse of children**

**Such behavior by any religious group is outrageous and reprehensible.**

**There are no reasons and no extenuating circumstances that could ever justify or rationalize any institution, public or private, or any religious denomination, not actively supporting attempts to bring childhood sexual abuse legislation into the 21st century.**

**Window legislation is not "anti" any particular group but it is very much pro-child. It forces records, if they exist and have not been destroyed, to be made available in a court of justice and hopefully into the public venue as well.**

**Arbitrary statutes of limitation have protected sexual predators and enabling institutions for too long. It is time they were removed. Delaware now has no statutes of limitation, criminally or civilly, in regard to childhood sexual abuse and our 2007 Child Victims Law also opened a two year window for bringing forward previously time barred cases by anyone, no matter what public, private or religious affiliation attaches.**

**The time to protect all children is now.**

**House Bill 1523 is a strong bill crafted to hold all institutions, public and private, in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts accountable for their actions.**

**I implore you, as a legislator in Massachusetts, to be very wary about accepting claims made by members of any religious institution, their spokesmen or their representatives that would attempt to connect passage of House Bill 1523 with the closing of churches, parishes, social services or outreach programs because it simply is not true and no denomination has produced proof that would support the waves of disinformation that have been circulated in the media.**

**Vicious opposition to the passage of any laws or the removal of any statutes of limitation regarding childhood sexual abuse of children has been the pattern employed by some leaders of religious institutions in a number of states including New York, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Ohio and Colorado.**

**There should be no accommodation in law that gives more protection to sexual predators of children and the enablers who conspired to protect them, then to the very real victims of childhood sexual abuse.**

**In all good conscience, I strongly encourage you, as a member of the Massachusetts' Legislature, to support criminal and civil laws that are as strong as possible in holding accountable the sexual predators of our children together with any enabling individuals or institutions who were complicit in their protection.**

**Support House Bill 1523.**

**I have spoken before the legislature in support of Delaware's 2007 Child Victims Law and I would be more than happy to testify in support of Massachusetts' Child Victims bill if it would be helpful.**

**God bless you for all the work you do,**

**Sister Maureen Paul Turlish  
Victims' Advocate  
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