



Written Testimony of The Fortney Family  
Pennsylvania State Senate  
Committee on the Judiciary

Public Hearing on the Statute of Limitations with respect to claims of sexual abuse  
Wednesday, October 02, 2019  
10:00 A.M.

Good morning, Chairman Baker and members of the Committee:

It is a privilege for our family to be able to submit this testimony to you today.

As a family, we strongly support Statute of limitations reform that must include a retroactive “look-back” window for time-barred victims to be able to hold their perpetrators accountable and the institutions that covered up their abuse if applicable. We believe that it is time that all victims of sexual assault have access to the justice and discovery they need in order to begin to heal and that any failure to enact window legislation sends the message to institutions that if they conceal knowledge of a predator long enough, that they can skirt the law and get away with it.

By passing window legislation to include both the perpetrator and the institutions, you will be protecting your constituents from all of the predators currently hiding behind the SOL because they will finally be named and exposed!

Our parents were raised as devout Catholics when they were children. They have said many times that they loved their faith and believed wholeheartedly that it was the most pure and Holy Faith system to be a part of. Both of our parents attended Catholic orphanages for a short time during their childhoods where they were loved and cared for. So as you can imagine, it's understandable that it was of the utmost importance to them that we would be immersed in the Catholic faith in order to experience the same level of joy, security and completeness they felt. They sacrificed tremendously in order for us to attend Catholic school and to be involved in the Catholic youth programs and sports teams.

In October, 1982, our predator priest, Reverend Augustine M. Giella, began his role as lead pastor at our church, St. John the Evangelist, in Enhaut-Steelton, PA. As a family, we were thrilled! But, over the next 10 years, this “man of God”, used masterful grooming techniques and the articles of our faith as weapons to destroy us.

Giella's abuse was uncovered in 1992. Some of the evidence found through a raid of his residence by PA and NJ police, subsequent interviews, depositions, his confession and through the discovery from the 40<sup>th</sup> Grand Jury found that Giella...

- Sexually molested 5 of 8 girls in our family (raped 2)
- Sexually molested our niece
- Possessed petri dishes of feces, a collection of pubic hair labeled with initials, dirty used tampons, vials of urine, soiled children's underwear and hundreds of pictures of young naked children still not identified to this day.

- Attempted to abuse another girl using our family name to persuade her, “\_\_\_\_\_ Fortney lets me do it to her” (found in Hbg. Diocese memo dated 1987...5 years before our abuse was discovered! We could have been saved 5 years earlier but the memo continues and Monsignor Overbaugh from the Bishops office instructs them to “do nothing”!!!)

Giella was moved throughout 4 churches in New Jersey before he was accepted into the Harrisburg diocese. While fighting for SOL reform in New Jersey, we met some of his many victims there and it was healing for all of us. Thankfully, the state of New Jersey passed the SOL reform bill with a look-back window so our family will finally be able to seek the discovery we have desperately needed for over 27 years! We WANT TO KNOW why this monster priest was brought to our front door and who covered up his abuse that allowed his transfer. We want to know EVERYTHING possible to help us put pieces into our puzzle that have been missing for so long. We want this for our entire family, including our parents who live with this travesty day in and day out! The unanswered questions literally have been consuming us.

In 1992 when our youngest sister, Carolyn’s abuse was the first to be discovered, our parents were shattered and in shock. Because they were unequipped and ill-advised, they agreed to sign a gag order that was written to include our entire family. The attorneys reiterated many times, through meetings and letters, the importance of everyone staying completely silent. We were so scared! That fear grew over the years and held our family in bondage in many ways until August 14, 2018, when the release of the 40th Grand Jury happened. It was a GIFT to our family because it was the first time in over 25 years that our story was made public and we were finally set free from the chains of silence! And, because of the discovery we had access to, we were able to put pieces into our puzzle that were missing for far too long. It truly was a life-changing event for all of us.

We implore you to consider SOL reform with a look-back window so that sexual assault victims, like us, can have the discovery they need. Your decision on this issue is literally a matter of life and death for so many.

EVERY victim deserves and NEEDS this and that is why we are here today...for them.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit our testimony.

Sincerely,  
The Fortney Family