

Statement/Testimony of Sarah Brooks
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I was sexually abused ages 14-15 by two adult members of my congregation of Jehovah's witnesses: one was a "brother" who was a family friend; and the other was my former sister in law. They abused me, individually, simultaneously and repeatedly.

I was at first groomed by the male abuser giving me alcohol which the church found out about immediately. But no steps were taken to protect me. After the abuse escalated in severity, my abusers kept me silenced with threats and scare tactics for many years. But when eventually I could not bare the shame and guilt any longer I did speak and I told my family, and again looked for help from my religious organization, the Jehovah's Witnesses. However, they handled it completely internally, shielding my known abuse from authorities.

The JW congregation disfellowshipped or shunned my two abusers and then proceeded to punish me, the victim of abuse. This punishment for speaking up of course caused me to be silent even further, again for years. Over those years of self-medicating, I dropped to the very lowest points a human being could fall to. And after a suicide attempt, I again attempted to speak. This time I went myself to the police in York County where I reported my own abuse, as the Jehovah Witness leaders did not contact the police. After I went through the painful experience of retelling my abuse to the York county authorities on numerous occasions I was yet again silenced, by the police telling me I had no proof and nothing more could be done, I walked away defeated and silenced yet again.

A dozen years had passed until I became educated about the Statue of Limitations. I never knew that from the day of my abuse I had this clock of justice ticking and slowly becoming more and more out of reach until I eventually would have NO rights. I, the victim would lose MY rights!

During my abuse my perpetrators threatened me with silence or one unthinkable, repulsive **act** would happen after another and a tidal wave of horrible things would occur to me for telling. Silence. Although I turned to the elders within the Jehovah's Witness for help and reporting to proper authorities, they told me to leave it in god's hands and to put it safely behind me. Silence.

After my sexual abuse, my family sided with caution and decided to hush, closing up rather than speaking up for me. Silence. I know my story is not unique and that other victims of child sexual abuse, within the JW and within other religions and institutions, have been silenced in the same ways.

How cruel it was for me to learn that now as an adult I was being told that I had to act now or risk holding this secret of sexual abuse to my grave because the law limits not my abuser but me. This law silences me? This law sides with my abusers and those who covered it up, not me. I have been treated so cruelly by family and friends and this religion and where do I look for justice? I look here.

I finally re-reported my abuse to the authorities and thankfully this time an extensive investigation was done to build a criminal case against both of my abusers. And eventually after being in turmoil for so long the years paid off. I was able to sit in a court room and in front of my abusers and in front of their family and close friends that day, I gave my victim impact statement. I told Joshua Caldwell, my male abuser, and his wife who sat right behind him just like she did when I was a child, what he did to me in detail. How I remembered his fist being rammed up into me, how he choked me by shoving his fingers into my mouth, how he grabbed me by my hair and shoved my face wherever he wanted pleasure for himself or my female abuser, all over, how horrific it was when he pinned me in his truck and wrapped the seat belt up around my neck and mouth. Each moment of my abuse and how it continued for months.

I told my female abuser how she had been like a sister to me, we were family, I thought she could have saved me from him and instead chose to feed upon me right alongside him like a carcass alongside the road. . I told the court how it changed my life forever. How disgusting they both were to me and how dangerous they were to the communities they hid in. I had walked into the courtroom that morning, weighted down with negative emotions, and so scared. I felt disgusting, humiliated, disgraced. I received what justice I could that day and even though it was not nearly the amount I had so desperately hoped for, I walked out of that court room with my head held high. For the first time in my life. For the first time they were being held accountable and I could release the shame, and the guilt and I was allowed to close that painful chapter of my life and move on into a healthier and happier one. I was ecstatic!

Months after I was waking up from sleep not with a tear soaked face, a depressed and exhausted mess from the nightmares, but I woke up from those years of abuse finally well rested, elated and high on life. Bubbling with joy and lighter because I wasn't carrying all that pain with me anymore. So many victims are held back from that gift, that opportunity of healing. Being able to charge my abusers was not about revenge or punishment because there isn't enough to compensate, it is about the healing that occurs when your abuser is publicly known and can no longer continue, it is about preventing another child from being harmed.

I wish I could say the same for the other survivors I met along the way. So many men, and women, of so various backgrounds that lost their rights. So many who were not able to seek retribution from those who abused them as children. It is heart wrenching to have these dear friends and loved ones who have their hands tied from pressing charges instead of their abusers hands cuffed and put where they deserve. It is frightening to have this many surviving friends who are silenced just like they were when they were in the middle of their abuse, unable to speak from fear and now unable to speak because of a disgusting law that prohibits them from healing.

Why would we hold back a victim from receiving all that they need in order to heal from all the pain that was inflicted on them at such a young age? Why would we stop them from being able to speak now that they are strong enough to do so? It is unfair and unjust to hold back a survivor, period.

Limitations, this idea of limiting a survivor is ridiculous. First, it is not right or fair to accelerate victims through the healing process because healing is different and unique to each of us. I believe justice can be best served when it is not rushed.

Second, was there a limit my abuser upheld while he forced sexual acts on my innocent body? Was there a limit that they upheld when it came to the pain that was inflicted upon me, physically and mentally? Limitations!? Why are we as a society setting a time limit to protect these perverts who are getting off on kids! We cannot accept limits when it comes to the protection and safety of children. It is unacceptable. This limiting and silencing of victims needs to stop, how will we

as a society begin to heal from this epidemic until we begin to help survivors, until we listen to them, ALL of them!

Full reform needs to be given to ALL victims, their ages should not even come into question. They need to be given the opportunity to heal at their own pace without restraint from a legal time limitation. I implore you to open the onetime 2 year retroactive civil window for time barred sexual abuse victims so ALL survivors can have the opportunity to speak their truth, the burden to prove is on the victim, it should be the victim's choice to file a civil suit if they wish. This is not about money, it is about protecting innocent children from being harmed by a sexual predator and those, like the JW who knowingly allow child sexual abuse to flourish. The only recourse a time barred sexual assault victim has is the retroactive civil window, this is their only chance to publicly call out their abuser to stop them and protect one more child from the lifetime sentence of sexual abuse. Abusers are typically not one time offenders, they will continue until they are caught, by voting against this reform you are doing the community a tremendous disservice, leaving every child including ones you know or in your own family at risk and vulnerable.

Child sexual abuse does not discriminate, it affects all social and economic levels, all races, every child is at risk, and predators are everywhere. They can be found in family systems, friends, sports, churches, healthcare workers, teachers, and even your own colleague **Senator Micheal Folmer**. IT DOES NOT DISCRIMINATE! Why for well over a decade has the protection of innocent children been being used as a pawn for special interests groups? Why are lobbyists, the insurance federation and the Catholic Church more important than protecting a child from a sexual predator? Every member who votes to oppose the legislation stands with sexual predators, there is no middle ground, and you either protect children or you protect pedophiles. So I ask each of you, which side will you stand on?

Like for example (I am using fake names as I do not know who is on the panel) Senator Smith, which side will you stand on? With children or with pedophiles? Senator Jones, which side will you stand on? With Children or with Pedophiles? And again...

I appreciate your time, and thank you for allowing me this opportunity to speak and attempt to break the silence of victims.