

My name is Paul Neyer and this picture represents the child I am here, speaking for today. That child spent 35 years finding his voice. He was traumatized by repeated events of sexual abuse over the course of 2 years and he was manipulated during those events to believe it was ok. As that child's mind grew with age and experience into adulthood, so did the understanding of right and wrong. Only as that understanding came, he still didn't grasp that what he endured was not his fault. That 8-year-old boy grew into a man that had been groomed, abused, and manipulated for so long that he also grew in feeling broken, unlovable, and dirty. That little boy was me. I am now 43 and today, I hope to put a face to the people Senate Bill 226 will impact.

As I grew up, I was plagued with feelings of disgust, self-hatred, and the overwhelming feeling of being unworthy. I fought to find a sense of acceptance in every aspect of my life from relationships to careers. There was a fear of being deemed broken that kept the weight of the world on my shoulders, and any chance at advancement in life remained overshadowed by the evil I endured as a child. It took almost 30 years to tell another that I was raped. The oral and anal rapes, that happened over a two-year period between the ages of 8 years old and 10 years old, were inflicted by a perceived trusted authority figure. Even as a grown man I was afraid to speak of what occurred. It took years of being in a stable and healthy relationship to open up about what happened to me. Soon after, I was able to tell family and a few close friends, and it took 3 more years to find the courage to stand against my abuser and the corporate power that sheltered him.

Though I still have a lot to do; through the love and support of those close to me, many hours of therapy, and the words "Guilty" spoken by my abuser 9 times, I have begun to heal and get some closure. But access to the ability to have one's abuser held responsible in court through the state of Ohio is not available for all. The Statute of Limitation laws in place ONLY protect those that assault children and do not allow the victims to have the time needed to mature, process, and muster up a mountain of strength to come forward. If you've never experienced the pain that 1 in 5 girls and 1 in 20 boys* like me have endured, you have no idea the weight we carry and the amount of time in a safe environment it takes to come to terms with what happened to us. During those 30-plus years it took me, my abuser continued to work closely with other children and remained under that same protected umbrella to become a priest. Someone with even more power and authority than he had when he did unspeakable things to me. The laws changed over time and by the grace of God fell perfectly in line to allow me to come forward and not only receive a self admitted guilty plea but also enabled the protection of others. Had those laws not changed, Geoff Drew would still be in a position to do harm.

People fear that eliminating SOL laws will allow people to abuse the system, but instead they forget the abused and continue to give control to evil. I can tell you that everyone's path to healing and finding their voice is different and you cannot put a timeline on it for victims of such awful crimes as being sexually abused, especially as a child. Eliminating or expanding the SOL laws for child sex abuse survivors allows them the time they need. And it does not make you a condemner or even the one who says someone is guilty, as that power will still fall where it was designed in our country. In a jury of one's peers.

Although you see the 43yo stand before you today, please take a moment to see the beaten, broken, manipulated, unworthy, and dirty-feeling 8-year-old me. Like the parable in Luke chapter 10, see that he lays before you begging for your compassion. You have the ability like the lawyer and the priest to turn

your shoulder and walk away, OR, you have the opportunity to do the right thing and be the Good Samaritan by actually seeing me.

History remembers 3 kinds of people. Those who endure evil, those who perpetrate or enable evil, and those who stand up to and stop it. I've endured it, now I'm standing up to it. With the power you hold you now sit in a position to either help stop it... or to enable it. Which side of history do you want to be remembered for?

I hope you look at this 8-year-old boy and honor him and those who have endured the things he has by passing Senate Bill 226 and continue to push forward to eliminate SOL laws and give victims the chance to find their voice.

Thank you

* *Child sexual abuse statistics*. The National Center for Victims of Crime. (n.d.). Retrieved May 30, 2022, from <https://victimsofcrime.org/child-sexual-abuse-statistics/>

