

Chairman Manning, Vice-chair Reynolds, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Senate Judiciary Committee,

My name is Chris Graham. I'm a business coach, a father of 3, a survivor of childhood sex abuse by priests, and one of the authors of HB 35, also known as "The Scout's Honor Law."

Today, we are in a race against time, tasked with passing the Scout's Honor Law; in time so that we can secure the same justice for Ohio's Scout survivors as survivors from other states like Louisiana, North Carolina, Arkansas and many more.

As we gather here to address this monumental human crisis, we have mere days to pass and enact The Scout's Honor Law to completely guarantee these men the same access to justice as survivors from other states. Any delay adds risk to how the world's largest and most complex bankruptcy case will unfold for Ohio's Scout Survivors. The process of this case has been fraught with delays, surprises, and complications, and we have an opportunity to end these survivors decades-long wait for justice, today.

You will hear the powerful testimonies of adult survivors of child sexual abuse who have chosen to step forward and share their harrowing experiences. They do this in the hope that their stories will inspire others to break the silence surrounding child sexual abuse and bring about a profound cultural transformation—a transformation that ends the stigma associated with being a survivor. If we can stop the stigma, we can stop the abuse, and today's survivors will be empowered to come forward much earlier than past generations of survivors.

ChildUSA, the largest think tank in the world for the prevention of child sex abuse, found that in a study of 1,576 BSA survivors, the average time of delayed disclosure of sexual abuse was 29 years. Let me state that again for the record: the average length of delayed disclosure about child sex abuse in this study was 29 years.

Listening to the survivors' accounts today will undoubtedly evoke a range of emotions, with sorrow being the primary one. We may question how such atrocities could have taken place and why our society has been infiltrated by so many child predators. For many of us, the hardest question is this: How could God let this happen?

While I may not be a claimant in this bankruptcy settlement, I, too, was once a Boy Scout. As a young child, I embarked on a journey to earn a faith-based merit badge from the Catholic Committee on Scouting. The priest I studied with didn't touch me, but he introduced me to the pedophile priests who would later inflict unimaginable pain & suffering on me and my friends in the years to come.

So, I come to you today as an ambassador for the Boy Scout Survivors in Ohio. I'm not one of them, but my own trauma makes them my brothers.

Before we proceed with hearing these men's stories, I want to offer some coaching; you will undoubtedly feel sorrow that these men endured these horrors during their childhood, but please remember that we are in the midst of a profound & beautiful cultural shift. For the first time in history, adult survivors of child sexual abuse are coming forward in unprecedented numbers to share their experiences.

It is beautiful to see this shift in our culture, and I encourage you to look through your sorrow at this beauty as you continue to experience a range of difficult emotions as you learn about the plight of these survivors.

And so, let's lean into that sorrow and take a look at some of the data we have about adult survivors of child sex abuse.

In the largest study of its kind, the University of Manchester discovered that adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse are 2-3 times more likely to attempt suicide.

A 2017 on NIH.gov study revealed that of two thousand individuals who had previously attempted suicide, 80% had a history of childhood abuse.

These men standing before you today are survivors in every sense of the word. They have not only endured childhood sexual abuse but also the torment of a relentless hope to escape from humanity through suicide.

The most harrowing aspect of child sexual abuse is not just the abuse itself; it's the tragic loss of lives to suicide.

I share this information with you today to emphasize the urgency of our mission. Public service has many noble motives, but our primary duty is to serve. Can any of us here think of a more significant way to serve the state of Ohio than by taking this giant step forward in passing this legislation, today?

These men have been through hell and back to stand before you, and today, understand that these men were not just raped; they were robbed, robbed of their voices, and they are here to take them back- and that is beautiful.

As you listen to their testimonies today, I implore you to let yourself fully feel the sorrow that comes with hearing another human recount childhood sex abuse. Yet, alongside that sorrow, embrace the beauty of this moment and let yourself stand in awe of these men and their exceptional courage. They are leading the way for countless others who have not yet healed enough to take back their voices too.

As you consider how you can advocate not just to pass this legislation, but to pass it with all possible speed, I am reminded of the Book of Esther in the Bible.

Esther rose to a position of great power as the wife of the king. Fortunately for her that rise to power didn't require an election campaign, fundraising, or befriending lobbyists though.

She did however face a grave political problem—the fate of her people, the Jews, hung in the balance. Predators threatened to completely destroy her people, and she alone possessed the power to advocate for them directly to the king, even at the risk of her own life.

While she considered what to do and how to save her people in a complicated political landscape, she weighed the risks and rewards of taking a stand. Her uncle wisely advised her risk it all to serve and save. As she weighed her options, her uncle coached her;

"Who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?"

Political pressure from all sides has insured that this legislation has been a challenge from day 1, but today, we have a chance to do something remarkable. We have an opportunity to propel Ohio forward, to catch up with our sister states and deliver justice to these adult survivors of child sexual abuse within Scouting.

Senators, today, you have a rare and pivotal opportunity to serve Ohio in a revolutionary way.

We can move forward today.

Send this bill to the Senate so that they can vote to send it back to the House for the emergency clause to be ratified, and ensure that these survivors receive an equal shot at justice as Boy Scout Survivors from other states.

Today is the day for action. Let us seize this opportunity, pass this bill today, and ensure that justice is served for Ohio's Scout survivors.

Chairman Manning, Vice-chair Reynolds, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Senate Judiciary Committee; I leave you with the same question that Esther's uncle asked her: "Who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?"