



House Civil Justice Committee
Proponent Testimony for House Bill 35
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Chair Hillyer, Vice Chair Mathews, Ranking Member Galonski and Members of the House Civil Justice Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony on House Bill 35. As Ohio's statewide sexual violence coalition, the Ohio Alliance to End Sexual Violence (OAESV) advocates for comprehensive responses and rape crisis services for survivors and empowers communities to prevent sexual violence.

OAESV fully supports initiatives to extend statutes of limitations for victims of crime, particularly for those impacted by sexual violence and other forms of abuse. Unlike non-sex crimes, sexual violence profoundly impacts victims across their lifespan. As crimes and their subsequent impacts to victims vary greatly, the government should not interfere with the ability of victims to access the justice system. Barriers in Ohio law should not prevent sexual abuse survivors of the Boy Scouts of America organization from pursuing the full amount of financial relief owed to them.

OAESV staff and Ohio's 36 Rape Crisis Programs work with thousands of survivors each year, including many impacted by child sexual abuse. We continue to confront the devastating, long-term harms this abuse costs Ohio communities, families, and survivors themselves. In our collaborative work with forensic nurses, physicians, mental health professionals, law enforcement, and prosecutors, we understand that survivors often go without necessary recourse because Ohio underestimates the complex interplay of long-term harms that manifest for decades after instances of child sexual abuse.

Further, while it *may* seem intuitive that a survivor would disclose abuse as soon as it occurs and thus fall within the established timeframe to bring a legal claim, data reveals that the phenomenon of delayed disclosure is more common to survivors of child sexual abuse. In a study of over 1,000 survivors, the average age at the time of reporting child sexual abuse was about 52.¹ Survivors may wait for decades, often well into adulthood, before disclosing the

¹ Spröber, N., Schneider, T., Rassenhofer, M., Seitz, A., Liebhardt, H., König, L., & Fegert, J. M. (2014). Child sexual abuse in religiously affiliated and secular institutions: a retrospective descriptive analysis of data provided by victims in a government-sponsored reappraisal program in Germany. *BMC public health*, *14*, 282. <https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2458-14-282>

abuse to anyone. Delayed disclosure, coupled with statutes of limitations, impact the path to justice and compensation for survivors. By the time most survivors come forward about their abuse, the statutes of limitation for filing legal claims have expired. Simply put, the doors to justice are locked and most survivors of child sexual abuse are denied a crucial path to healing.

We are encouraged to see the introduction of House Bill 35 and the progress made for survivors of sexual violence in recent years. In 2019, 23 states and Washington D.C. amended their SOLs to expand opportunities for survivors to access justice.² In Ohio, this is now the second piece of legislation that has proposed a narrow exception to the civil statute of limitations for a specific group of survivors. Instead of continuing to take a piecemeal approach to SOL exceptions for certain cases of large-scale abuse perpetration, we encourage this committee to create a taskforce to study the needs of survivors of child sexual abuse and rape impacted by SOL limitations and other legal barriers in Ohio.

We are taking a step in the right direction with House Bill 35. No survivor should be limited in recovering compensation due to Ohio's civil statute of limitations. Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of my testimony. I am happy to answer any questions you may have via email at egemar@oaesv.org.

² Hamilton, M. (2019). Child Sexual Abuse Statutes of Limitation Reform from January 2002 through October 2019: A National Overview of the Movement to Prevent Child Sex Abuse and Empower Victims through Statutes of Limitation Reform Since 2002. CHILD USA. <https://childusa.org/sol-report-2019/>