

Horace Mann Action Coalition

Nov. 16th, 2015, Washington, D.C.

The American public is learning what the advocates and abuse prevention groups here have known and confronted over years in their work to support survivors: the role of institutions in enabling most sexual abuse.

Behind the vast majority of incidents of sexual abuse are a repeated set of crimes the justice system overlooks in many states and by doing so, perpetuates continued abuse and harm.

It's time to recognize the pattern we see in repeated abuse rather than react to each new revelation.

"We hope it goes away" isn't a prevention strategy, it's an obscene free pass for organizations hiding abuse and worse, a deadly message to unspoken victims everywhere which shouts "we don't want you to speak up."

From our research, we see a clear pattern again and again: When an abuser is reported, organizations most often cover it up. The victim is stalled. The abuser isn't confronted or is moved, allowing further abuse. The abuser continues to operate. How? By running out the clock, using the state's SOL as a roadmap. The institution takes advantage of that perverse incentive, games the system and claims no accountability for creating the majority of abuse.

I know. In my own school, sexual abuse on an unimaginable scale continued for more than 35 years, despite repeated reports made by victims, students, parents and teachers to the administration. Some victims committed suicide. Most suffer life-long wounds.

Add many further failures to the covering up of reports and the intimidation of those reporting:

- Not alerting authorities
- Not investigating or documenting accounts received so subsequent abuse would be obvious
- Not looking for the likely other victims
- Not counseling those harmed
- Not informing parents of abuse reported of their own children
- Not confronting abusers
- Not alerting schools where abusers moved on to teach

At each step, they hurt victims already wounded, hide abusers, and stall justice - all to put reputation over safety with impunity. Even years later, with a fresh opportunity to help heal, they stonewall and re-injure.

Why do we still allow schools, religious groups and other institutions to betray trust and subvert accountability? Why is the same abuse confronted quickly in one state and invisible next door?

A national commission would have the power to investigate and would recognize what we all have seen. Our colleagues in Australia had the courage to examine historic and nationwide abuse with enough perspective to see it as it really is. They concluded:

"We need to move from an understanding of institutions as merely places where child sexual abuse may occur to places where the institution itself is conducive to crime. And if institutions or organizations are directly or indirectly responsible for criminal behaviour such as child sexual assault, the law should hold them to account."

Peter Brooks, HM '66

Links for further information:

About our group of concerned alumni and national experts:

<http://makingschoolsafe.com/about/>

Tools to help parents and teachers:

<http://makingschoolsafe.com/quiz/>

Our Report, with recommendations and best practices:

<http://makingschoolsafe.com/the-report/>

How schools with recent accounts of abuse compare -- NY state vs. Others

<http://on.fb.me/1MZ7AWN>

News and updates:

<http://makingschoolsafe.com/blog/>

"Great is the Truth," by Amos Kamil with Sean Elder:

<http://www.amazon.com/Great-Is-Truth-Secrecy-Scandal-ebook/dp/B00W1CO7D6>

Podcast on NPR, "Lessons On Abuse, Secrecy And Justice From The Horace Mann School" :

<https://thekojonnamdishow.org/shows/2015-11-09/child-predators>

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