

Bill to extend statute of limitations on rape moves to full Senate

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INDIANAPOLIS – Keith Morris, a victim of a sexual assault as a child, found himself unable to seek justice for the crime committed against him.

After 24 years of processing the incident, he finally came forward and shared what he had experienced, but nothing could be done because the statute of limitations of rape is five years in Indiana.

Sen. Michael Crider, R-Greenfield, presented Senate Bill 94 to the Senate Corrections and Criminal Law Committee on Tuesday that would extend the statute of limitations by five years, so long as the state discovers DNA evidence sufficient to charge the offender, or if a person confesses to the offense after the first five years. The bill passed unanimously.

Jenny Ewing was raped in 2005, and did not tell anyone about the attack. Her attacker came forward last year, but was not charged with rape because the confession happened outside of the five-year statute of limitations.

Crider said that after hearing of this case, he has been on a mission to change the law so that rapists such as Ewing's attacker may see justice.

Ewing testified in support of the bill via Skype – the first time in Indiana's history a committee heard testimony by using an electronic device. She now lives in Oregon and could not make the trip to support the bill in person.

Ewing said the memories of the assault never go away for a victim, no matter if it is five years, 10 years, or 50 years. She also said that it is always better to report an attack right away, no matter how painful it may be.

"I made the mistake when I was raped in 2005 by not reporting," Ewing said. "I continue to tell people that they should always report."

Morris said that all of Indiana's surrounding states have either no statute of limitations for rape cases or a much longer one.

As of last year, Indiana ranked 15th in the nation for rape rates – an average of 25.5 out of every 1,000 Hoosiers.

At the age of 15, Joy Ryder became a victim of sexual assault to someone she knew. It took her 25 years to come forward, and she said most victims take one to two decades to come forward. Ryder flew in from Texas to attend the hearing and testify.

"I believe that we should have no statute of limitations in Indiana," Ryder said. "We have one of the worst statute of limitations in the country."

Ryder began a nonprofit organization to aid sexually abused men and women and said she has talked to countless victims who believe that the statute of limitations law re-victimizes them.

Near the end of her testimony, Ryder said that the bill just isn't good enough, and said she believes the state should knock out the statute of limitations altogether.

"I am hopeful that these young ladies that are victimized will have some opportunity for justice which currently does not exist if the facts come forward outside the statute of limitations," Crider said. "I am hopeful that in some cases this will provide closure and what they feel like is justice for them."

Crider's initial wanted to call for an end to the statute of limitations altogether in Indiana. But he said adding five years is the only extension he thought he could approved.

"I felt like this was a more median proposal we could get passed, and obviously that is the case since we passed unanimously," Crider said.

The bill now moves to the Senate for further consideration.

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