The Josh Duggar and Dennis Hastert cases highlight the need to reform criminal and civil statutes of limitations (SOL) so that victims of childhood sexual abuse can seek justice in the courts of law when they are ready, even if it is years after the abuse against them occurred. In fact, I dare anyone to name the never-ending list of perpetrators and institutions that have cheated justice and gotten a free pass from this legal technicality—Penn State, the Olympic swim team, Catholic and Latter-day Saints bishops, Jewish rabbis, the Horace Mann School in New York, and the Boy Scouts, among others. All these, and thousands of others show how perverse the current SOLs can be when it comes to this horrific crime. There is hope, though.

An SOL is nothing other than a deadline for going to court. And when it expires, a victim—regardless of the strength of the case—is shut out of the justice system. There are good reasons for SOLs in many contexts, like contract and property disputes, but no good reason for an SOL when the victim is a child. We know that the average age for victims to come forward is 42, which is several decades after the abuse occurred. So, the only beneficiaries of short SOLs are sex offenders themselves, and entities that aid and abet and cover up their crimes.

The criminal charges filed last week against the Minneapolis Archdiocese show the light that shines at the end of the SOL tunnel.

The SOLs Prevent Justice for Hastert's Victims

Three of Dennis Hastert's victims have come forward. So far, no one is remotely within the Illinois criminal or civil SOLs. When Hastert was a coach at Yorkville High School in Illinois from 1965 to 1981, the child sex abuse SOLs were cruelly short. The criminal SOL ran three years after the abuse, and the personal injury SOL ran two years after the event. That's right; victims had to race to court to get justice.

But for these short SOLs, Hastert's victims could have pressed charges or sued Hastert for the abuse when they were ready, which is more often than not in one's 40s. According to the indictment, Hastert's payments to one of his victims began in 2010. If that man was 15 in 1980 (to use round numbers), he was 45 in 2010.

We don't know if any of his victims went to prosecutors before then. It is unlikely because until the turn of the century, victims were nearly uniformly silent. As Steven Reinboldt's sister reports, he didn't think anyone would believe him. Sadly, he died of AIDS in 1995, before he reached the age at which many victims are able to come forward. Even if they did, the odds are nearly 100 percent that they would have missed the SOL deadline.

Imagine the public consequences had a prosecutor been able to file charges earlier. With Hastert unmasked, he might not have been in the position in 2006 as Speaker of the House to cover up Rep. Mark Foley's sexual abuse of high school pages. When Hastert was criticized for that cover up, he shrugged and said, "would have, should have, could have," a hard-hearted response that now sounds like a confession.

The Duggars Endangered Their Children and Then Benefitted From the SOLs

The Josh Duggar case creates an echo chamber on SOLs. Arkansas prosecutors say that they could not go forward due to the SOL in that state. The law required prosecution within three years of a report, or seven years after the age of

majority. Without more information, it is difficult to know which governs, so the prosecutors must be taken at their word.

What few are paying attention to, though, is that Josh was not the only wrongdoer. Parents are required to protect their children from abuse and neglect. What were Jim Bob and Michelle thinking when they waited until Josh had told them *three times* that he had abused his sisters (and apparently a babysitter) before they took action? Giving an abuser a pass constitutes neglect, and doing so makes a person complicit in the abuse that happened after the first abuse. But the SOLs on those charges also expired long ago.

By the way, the fact that the girls were asleep does not solve Jim Bob, Michelle, or Josh's problems anymore than it solves Bill Cosby's. Taking advantage of defenseless girls and women is classic sex offender behavior, not a kinder way to do it. For all four of them, the SOLs are their "solution."

The Minnesota SOL Reform Shows the Door to Real Justice

Before survivors everywhere despair, the movement for SOL reform is the light at the end of the tunnel, and the recent criminal charges against the Minneapolis Archdiocese should give each and every one of you hope. In 2013, Minnesota joined the growing number of states that have enacted new lawsthat revive expired SOLs. Minnesota's version is a three-year window from 2013–16 that bars the statute of limitations defense even if the SOL had previously expired. The state also has eliminated its civil SOL and its criminal SOL where DNA has been preserved.

The revived civil SOLs pushed buried evidence to the sunlight, and prosecutors were able to file criminal charges against the Archdiocese for gross misdemeanors endangering children. This is the first criminal prosecution of a diocese for endangering children, despite the nationwide endangerment by the bishops, who have banked on (and invested in) short SOLs.

While it is unconstitutional to revive a criminal SOL, when the civil SOLs are revived, victims come forward and point to trails of evidence that in turn can lead to criminal charges that are within the SOL. That is precisely what happened in Minnesota, and that is the sole reason that prosecutors have filed charges against the Minneapolis Archdiocese for the predatory priest, Curtis Wehmeyer.

High-profile cases or not, the time is now for each and every state legislature and Supreme Court to do an SOL gut check and start choosing children over predators and institutions, especially the four states at the very bottom of the barrel: Alabama, Michigan, Mississippi, and New York. Why is it so difficult to move SOLs aside? Powerful lobbyists —including the Catholic bishops, the Latter-day Saints bishops, and Jewish rabbis—invest millions against the victims, and the insurance lobby enjoys collecting premiums while it avoids having to pay out. Legislators have listened to the lobbyists and not the victims in too many states for too long. Predators know SOLs and they gravitate to the states with the worst SOLs. Thus, SOL reform really is a choice: predators or children.

Let's take the SOL out of the child sex abuse picture.