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## Samaritan SafeChurch – Religious Leaders Step Up to Support Reform of PA Statutes of Limitation for Child Sexual Abuse

May 13th, 2016 by admin

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### Religious Leaders Step Up to Support Reform of PA Statutes of Limitation for Child Sexual Abuse

Blog Post #7: May 13, 2016



by [Linda Crockett, Director of SafeChurch/SafePlaces](#)

Christian faith community leaders are adding their voices to the growing cry for reform of PA's Statutes of Limitations to support access to justice for survivors, accountability for those who harm, and protection of children. A "sign-on" letter to Senator Stewart Greenleaf (R-Montgomery/Bucks), chair of the Judiciary Committee, is circulating to religious leaders across the state, and I am encouraged by many who indicate they are signing. The link for sign on is open until May 27 at <http://www.pcar.org/communities-faith-support-reforming-pa-statutes-limitations-child-sexual-abuse-cases>

The letter, initially drafted by SafeChurch as part of a coalition of organizations convened by the PA Coalition Against rape, encourages the Judiciary Committee to act swiftly to move HB 1947, passed by the House last month, in its current form to the Senate for a vote. We also call on Senator Greenleaf to champion the legislation in the Senate. As it stands, the bill will:

1. Eliminate the criminal statutes of limitations for certain child sexual assault cases
2. Extend the civil statute of limitations from at 30 to age 50 to give survivors additional time to attempt to seek damages
  - By the time many survivors of child sexual abuse in Pennsylvania begin to deal with their abuse, they are well past their 30th birthday and the window for justice is closed by the civil statute of limitations.
3. The extension of the civil statutes would be "retroactive" for survivors older than 30 but younger than 50 – in other words, those people would now have until age 50 to file.

#### How we got here

Many people have worked for years to extend or eliminate the statutes for child sexual abuse in PA. But significant reform of the Statutes remained stalled, despite the Sandusky scandal, and the sexual abuse scandal in the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Philadelphia, revealed through a grand jury investigation in 2005 and followed in early 2011 by a new grand jury report of extensive new charges of abusive priests active in the archdiocese. Opposition to reform from the Pennsylvania Catholic Conference was, until recently, largely unchallenged in a public way by religious leaders from other denominations.

Last October, I spoke for those in faith communities who believe in justice for survivors, accountability for offenders, and protection of children through reform of our Statutes at a Press Conference in the Capital called by Rep. Mark Rozzi from Berks County, a driving force for years to move legislation forward in the House on this issue.

[http://lancasteronline.com/opinion/columnists/child-sex-abuse-victims-deserve-time-to-seek-justice/article\\_2444f3b2-6e0a-11e5-a8ee-e7549b4ab7d1.html](http://lancasteronline.com/opinion/columnists/child-sex-abuse-victims-deserve-time-to-seek-justice/article_2444f3b2-6e0a-11e5-a8ee-e7549b4ab7d1.html)

A survivor of abuse by a priest, Rep. Rozzi powerfully gave voice to survivors, opening his colleagues' eyes and hearts to why there should never be a statute of limitations on prosecuting sexually-based crimes against children and also why it remains so important to give survivors extended time to pursue a civil action. He spoke of several friends, also survivors, who have killed themselves.

We are standing on the shoulders of many allies who have gone before us. Those of us who are survivors know all too well the devastation sexual abuse causes, and how hard it is to tell anyone. To learn more about why delayed disclosure is common, and the importance of retroactivity for the Statutes, visit the SafeChurch reading room at <http://scclanc.org/clergy-congregation-care/safechurch/safechurch-resources/articles>

#### Is this the tipping point?

The last straw seemed to be the horrific abuse and cover up in Roman Catholic Diocese of Altoona-Johnstown detailed in the Grand Jury report released by PA's Attorney General Kathleen Kane in March 2016. The report may be downloaded at the link below, and comes with a warning of "graphic content". Fifty priests and other religious leaders molested hundreds of children and the church, aided by deference and loyalty of secular authorities to church leaders, covered it up. [http://www.pennlive.com/politics/index.ssf/2016/03/grand\\_jury\\_accuses\\_priests\\_in.html](http://www.pennlive.com/politics/index.ssf/2016/03/grand_jury_accuses_priests_in.html)

The report revealed that church officials kept a payout chart based on levels of abuse. Victims of Level 1 abuse, which included above-clothing genital fondling, could receive \$10,000 to \$25,000. Victims of Level 4 abuse, the highest level, which included sodomy and intercourse, could receive \$50,000 to \$175,000 from the diocese.

Opposition from the Catholic Conference to reform remained. Marci Hamilton, an attorney who has helped to reform to statutes of limitations in other states, directly challenged the arguments by the Conference in an April 3 letter to Members of the General Assembly. <http://sol-reform.com/2016/04/my-responses-to-the-pennsylvania-catholic-conferences-misleading-arguments>

As details about what happened in the Altoona-Johnstown Diocese continued to make national news, and pressure within PA grew, House members who had refused to move legislation forward began to reconsider.

House Judiciary Chair Ron Marsico (Republican, Dauphin County), previously a reform opponent, had what could be described as a "Saul – Paul" like conversion, sponsoring the new bill, HB 1947, which was overwhelmingly passed by the House with a vote of 180 to 15 and is now in the hands of the Senate Judiciary Committee, chaired by Senator Stewart Greenleaf.

Although we do not know if the letter to Chairman Greenleaf from religious leaders that is now circulating will have any impact, we can say that for the many survivors of child sexual abuse who have been longing to hear the voices of pastors, bishops and other religious leaders speak up for justice – a prayer has been answered.

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