



To: The House Judiciary Committee
From: Suzanne V. Estrella, Esq.
Commonwealth Victim Advocate
Date: March 23, 2023
Re: Statute of Limitations - House Bill 1

Thank you to Chairman Briggs and Chairman Kauffman and the esteemed members of the House Judiciary Committee.

The Office of Victim Advocate is the state agency with the duty and authority to advocate for the rights and needs of all crime survivors. We accomplish our mission through victim services, crime prevention and restorative justice efforts. Our goal is to work in collaboration with other state agencies and local county community service providers to create safer caring communities where justice thrives. We seek to elevate the voices of crime survivors and ensure that their rights and needs are centered in legislation and policies that directly impact their journeys.

Statute of Limitations reform is an issue that has been at the forefront of victim rights and needs for many years. Legislators and interested parties have debated the constitutionality of reviving what some consider an expired claim, the proper application of the remedies clause as well as the appropriate means to create a much-needed pathway to justice. We are a community that upholds the rule of law and values long standing principles of liberty and justice for all. Conversations that reveal truth and dispel myths are crucial when balancing the scales of justice and ensuring equal access for all. The Office of the Victim Advocate acknowledges those who have kept this conversation at the forefront and we value their commitment to create change that will sustain judicial scrutiny. The window to justice that we seek on behalf of all survivors of childhood sexual abuse will not alter the rules of civil procedure nor diminish evidentiary standards. The window will provide some semblance of justice; the opportunity for a wrong to be redressed.

We teach our children to respect authority. We convey the message that authority figures are safe. When adults choose to violate that position of trust through lying, deceiving, manipulating and sexually assaulting children, there should be a price to pay. I am hoping that you will choose to be a history maker that elevates the welfare of children over the possible detriment of institutions and individuals who have chosen to harm them. This need for justice warrants no limitation. We should proudly proclaim, in any space, at any time, that sexual abuse of children will no longer be tolerated. Adults who may have been silenced by sexual abuse as children, have the right seek justice.

The Office of the Victim Advocate honors the voices and the courage of the thousands of adult survivors of childhood sexual assault who with fierce commitment have championed this cause year after year along with all the Pennsylvania citizens who are allies in this fight.

Respectfully, I implore you. Please, open the window to justice.