



## TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 7200

House Committee on Judiciary

March 12, 2026

POSITION: FAVORABLE

Submitted by: Children's Justice Campaign at Enough Abuse

Dear Chairwoman McEntee and esteemed members of the Committee:

The Children's Justice Campaign at Enough Abuse submits this testimony to express our organization's **strong support for House Bill 7200**.

This legislation addresses a critical need to protect children in Rhode Island's communities and ensure justice for survivors of childhood sexual abuse ("CSA"). By extending the statute of limitation ("SOL") for civil actions against perpetrators *and institutions* and opening a two-year revival window for expired claims, House Bill 7200 empowers survivors to seek accountability and promotes a safer environment for Rhode Island's children now and into the future.

### I. The Science of Trauma and Delayed Disclosure Demands SOL Reform

#### A. There is a Nationwide Epidemic of CSA Causing Lifelong Damage to Victims

Childhood sexual abuse is not a rare occurrence; it is a crisis in our communities that demands immediate attention. Approximately **1 in 8 children** —about **1 in 4 girls** and **1 in 13 boys**— will experience sexual abuse before their 18th birthday.<sup>1</sup>



The effects of childhood sexual abuse are severe, far-reaching, and long-lasting, impacting survivors physically, psychologically, and socially across the lifespan. The landmark Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study established a dose-response relationship between childhood sexual abuse and long-term health outcomes, demonstrating that CSA alters brain development,



immune function, and stress-response systems in ways that persist well into adulthood.<sup>ii</sup> Physically, survivors experience significantly elevated rates of chronic pain, sleeping disorders, obesity, gynecological problems, and gastrointestinal disorders, and are thirty percent more likely to develop serious medical conditions such as cancer, diabetes, high blood pressure, stroke, and heart disease.<sup>iii</sup>

The psychological toll is equally devastating with survivors suffering from higher levels of anxiety, depression, suicidal ideation and behavior, eating disorders, non-epileptic seizures, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and substance abuse.<sup>iv</sup> Female CSA survivors are two to four times more likely to attempt suicide, and male CSA survivors are four to eleven times more likely to attempt suicide than their non-abused peers.<sup>v</sup>

Socially, CSA disrupts the development of trust, attachment, and interpersonal functioning, leading to significantly higher rates of revictimization, difficulties in intimate relationships, marital disruption, and impaired parenting capacity. These effects are not attenuated or eliminated by the mere passage of time — they compound across the lifespan, with research confirming that survivors who delay disclosure experience higher rates of PTSD symptomatology than those who disclose promptly.<sup>vi</sup>

Survivors are also forced to bear the staggering costs of their abuse. The estimated lifetime cost of CSA per victim is \$282,734, including \$223,581 in lost productivity, \$14,357 in childhood medical costs, \$9,882 in adult medical costs, \$8,333 in child welfare costs, \$3,760 in special education costs, and \$2,434 in criminal justice costs — a burden borne overwhelmingly by survivors and taxpayers rather than the individuals and institutions responsible for the abuse.<sup>vii</sup>

These devastating impacts underscore the urgent need to address the trauma of CSA and provide avenues for healing and justice.

## **B. How Trauma Silences Victims and Prevents Timely Disclosure**

The trauma associated with childhood sexual abuse creates significant barriers to reporting. Studies show that 44.9% of male CSA victims and 25.4% of female CSA victims who eventually disclose do so more than twenty years after the abuse.<sup>viii</sup> An estimated 70–95% never report to police at all.<sup>ix</sup> This silence is not a reflection of a lack of courage but rather the profound neurobiological impact of abuse, including deep-seated fear, shame, and the manipulation tactics employed by perpetrators. Rhode Island's current SOL fails to account for these realities.



### When Do Survivors First Disclose Childhood Sexual Abuse?

*The majority of survivors wait decades — or never come forward at all*



For both children and adults, disclosure of CSA trauma is a process and not a discrete event in which a victim comes to terms with their abuse. To effectively protect children from abuse, SOL laws must reflect this science.

## II. SOL Reform Benefits the Common Good

A statute of limitation is a law that sets a time limit for filing a lawsuit—an arbitrary deadline established by the legislature. SOLs make sense for most civil wrongs; however, they are not appropriate for sexual abuse claims where the effects of trauma and inherent power dynamics keep victims silenced, often for decades after the victim reaches the age of majority. Once the SOL has passed, a person can no longer sue, regardless of the merits of their claim thereby further silencing survivors and allowing abusers to escape accountability. Extending the SOL and opening a revival window is not solely about access to justice for victims; there are also four significant public safety benefits:



## HOW SOL REFORM BENEFITS THE COMMON GOOD

Four compelling public purposes served by extending statutes of limitation and opening revival windows

**01**

### PROTECTS KIDS NOW

Identifying hidden predators and the institutions that shield them prevents future abuse of children

**02**

### TRANSFERS THE COST OF ABUSE

Shifts the financial burden — estimated at \$282,734 per victim — from survivors and taxpayers to responsible parties

**03**

### EDUCATES COMMUNITIES

Raises public awareness about the extent of abuse and empowers communities to recognize and prevent it

**04**

### PREVENTS FUTURE ABUSE

Forces institutions to adopt safer child protection policies, procedures, training, and accountability structures

### III. Revival of Time-Barred Claims is Constitutional

The retroactive revival of civil SOLs is constitutional under both federal and Rhode Island law. The United States Supreme Court has squarely held that a state statute abolishing a statute of limitations defense does not deprive a defendant of property without due process of law.<sup>x</sup> The Court reaffirmed that retroactive civil legislation is constitutional where legislative intent is clear and the change is procedural, noting that “the constitutional impediments to retroactive civil legislation are now modest.”<sup>xi</sup>

Rhode Island’s own precedent is in accord. The Rhode Island Supreme Court has held that “there were no federal or state constitutional restraints on the Legislature’s right to restore a remedy barred by the passage of time.”<sup>xii</sup> The case *Kelly v. Marcantonio*, 678 A.2d 873 (R.I. 1996), does not foreclose revival. The statute at issue in *Kelly* contained no explicit legislative intent to revive expired claims—the text made no mention of which claims would be affected.<sup>xiii</sup> This is precisely what distinguished *Kelly* from *Twomey* and *Dandeneau*, where the Legislature included express directives for retroactivity.<sup>xiv</sup> The Legislature has since addressed this deficiency, amending



section 9-1-51(a)(3) in 2019 to expressly provide that claims may be commenced “*regardless if the claim was time-barred under previous version of general laws.*”<sup>xv</sup> This clear language satisfies the constitutional requirements articulated in *Twomey*, *Dandeneau*, and *Theta Property*, rendering the *Kelly* holding no longer instructive as to section 9-1-51’s constitutionality.

Even assuming a defendant possesses a due process interest in an expired SOL, that interest is not absolute under Rhode Island law and can be overcome. The Rhode Island Supreme Court has characterized the “vested right” concept as “merely conclusory and disfavored when considering due process challenges to retroactive legislation,”<sup>xvi</sup> and has instead employed a balancing test weighing “the public interest in retroactivity against the unfairness created.”<sup>xvii</sup> Protecting Rhode Island’s children’s from sexual abuse is a compelling government interest of “surpassing importance”<sup>xviii</sup>— soundly outweighing any unfairness to defendants. This conclusion is consistent with a strong national consensus. Courts in Massachusetts, Maryland, New York, New Jersey, California, Delaware, and other states have upheld revival laws under due process frameworks closely paralleling Rhode Island’s.<sup>xix</sup> States that have reached contrary results have done so under express constitutional bans on retrospective laws,<sup>xx</sup> or under finality and open-courts doctrines that Rhode Island has not adopted. Rhode Island’s Constitution contains no express retrospectivity clause, no open-courts provision, and its due process jurisprudence affirmatively embraces the balancing approach that supports revival.

#### **IV. Rhode Island Should Join the National Consensus on SOL Reform**

The gold standard of SOL reform for CSA is for states to eliminate civil and criminal SOLs and revive expired civil claims. Vermont, Guam, and the Northern Mariana Islands have achieved this standard, and Maryland came close with its Child Victims Act of 2023, which eliminated all civil SOLs and applied retroactively to revive previously time-barred claims. At the federal level, the Eliminating Limits to Justice for Child Sex Abuse Victims Act of 2022 removed the civil SOL for federal CSA claims.

**As of 2026, twenty-one states, two territories, and the federal government have eliminated civil SOLs for some or all CSA claims and thirty-three states and territories have enacted revival or lookback windows.**



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## THE NATIONAL CONSENSUS ON SOL REFORM

*As of 2026 — the trend is unmistakable*

# 21+

STATES, TERRITORIES  
& THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

have eliminated  
civil statutes of limitations  
for child sexual abuse claims

AR, AK, AZ, CA, CO, CT, DE, FL, IL,  
LA, ME, MD, MN, NE, NV, NH, UT, VT,  
WA, Fed, NMI & Guam

# 33+

STATES & TERRITORIES

have enacted revival or  
lookback windows for  
previously time-barred claims

AL, AZ, AR, CA, CO\*, CT, DE, GA, HI,  
IN, IA, KS, KY, LA, ME, MD, MA, MI,  
MN, MT, NV, NJ, NY, NC, OH, OR, RI,  
UT\*, VT, WV, DC, NMI & Guam

Rhode Island has a commendable history of taking positive steps to address the longstanding CSA SOL issue, demonstrating a commitment to protecting children. The state has previously amended § 9-1-51(a)(3) to revive claims against *perpetrators* regardless of time-bar, and to extend claims against *non-perpetrators* that were *not already* time-barred. H7200 eliminates that distinction by reviving claims against *all* defendants, including institutions, regardless of whether they were previously time-barred. Presently, institutions and youth serving organizations have no incentive to adopt better practices, procedures, training, and responses to child sexual abuse within their system. That leaves the children of Rhode Island at great risk. H 7200 builds upon this foundation, taking an even more significant step to align Rhode Island with a growing national consensus that justice for survivors demands the complete elimination of arbitrary time limits and the full revival of past claims.



 <b>REVIVAL RANKING GRADES</b> 		
Revival Legislation Protects Children		
GRADE	JURISDICTION	EXPLANATION
A	Vermont, Maine, Guam, N. Mariana Islands	Complete elimination & permanent window
A-	Maryland	Permanent window but exclusion for deceased survivors and damage cap
B+	Arkansas, California, Delaware, Hawaii, Louisiana, New Jersey, New York & Washington	2+ year window All Defendants
C	Arizona, Colorado, Kentucky, Minnesota, Montana, North Carolina & Washington D.C.	Window, but not for all Defendants
D	Georgia, Michigan, Nevada & Connecticut	Narrowly drawn window or limited age extension
	Rhode Island and all other states	No window, no revival, or limited to some Defendants
I (incomplete)	Alabama, Ohio, Indiana, Iowa	Boy Scouts Bills



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#### IV. Conclusion

Once again, we urge this committee to support H7200. This legislation acknowledges the realities of delayed disclosure and the long-term impacts of CSA, fostering an environment where survivors can heal and hold perpetrators accountable. Critically, H 5909 sends a strong message to would-be offenders and their enabling institutions that they will be held accountable, thereby creating a safer environment for Rhode Island's children now and into the future.

Respectfully submitted,



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<sup>i</sup> Stoltenborgh, Marije et al. *A global perspective on child sexual abuse: meta-analysis of prevalence around the world.* Child maltreatment vol. 16,2 (2011): 79-101. doi:10.1177/1077559511403920.

<sup>ii</sup> Vincent J. Felitti et al., *Relationship of Childhood Abuse and Household Dysfunction to Many of the Leading Causes of Death in Adults: The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study*, 14 Am. J. Preventive Med. 245, 251 (1998); S.R. Dube et al., *Childhood Abuse, Household Dysfunction, and the Risk of Attempted Suicide Throughout the Life Span*, 286 JAMA 3089 (2001).

<sup>iii</sup> Sachs-Ericsson et al., *A Review of Childhood Abuse, Health, and Pain-Related Problems: The Role of Psychiatric Disorders and Current Life Stress*, 10(2) J. Trauma & Dissociation 170, 171 (2009); Maria H. Nagtegaal & Cyril Boonmann, *Child Sexual Abuse and Problems Reported by Survivors of CSA: A Meta-Review*, 31(2) J. Child Sexual Abuse 147, 147–76 (2022).

<sup>iv</sup> Josie Spataro et al., *Impact of Child Sexual Abuse on Mental Health: Prospective Study in Males and Females*, 184 Brit. J. Psychiatry 416 (2004); T.L. Simpson et al., *Concomitance Between Childhood Sexual and Physical Abuse and Substance Use Problems: A Review*, 22 Clinical Psychol. Rev. 27 (2002) (finding adult survivors of CSA are nearly three times as likely to report substance abuse problems as non-survivor peers).

<sup>v</sup> I. Angelakis et al., *Childhood Maltreatment and Adult Suicidality: A Comprehensive Systematic Review with Meta-Analysis*, Psychol. Med. 1–22 (2019).

<sup>vi</sup> Ramona Alaggia et al., *Facilitators and Barriers to Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) Disclosures: A Research Update (2000–2016)*, 20 Trauma Violence Abuse 260, 270–72 (2019); R. Anda et al., *The Enduring Effects of Abuse and Related Adverse Experiences in Childhood*, 256 Eur. Arch. Psychiatry & Clinical Neuroscience 174, 175 (2005); M. Merrick et al., *Unpacking the Impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences on Adult Mental Health*, 69 Child Abuse & Neglect 10 (2017); Sarah E. Ullman, *Relationship to Perpetrator, Disclosure, Social Reactions, and PTSD Symptoms in Child Sexual Abuse Survivors*, 16 J. Child Sexual Abuse 19, 30 (2007).

<sup>vii</sup> Elizabeth J. Letourneau et al., *The Economic Burden of Child Sexual Abuse in the United States*, 79 Child Abuse & Neglect 413 (2018); Fang et al., *The Economic Burden of Child Maltreatment in the United States and Implications for Prevention*, 36 Child Abuse & Neglect 156, 160–62 (2012).

<sup>viii</sup> Patrick J. O'Leary & James Barber, *Gender Differences in Silencing Following Childhood Sexual Abuse*, 17 J. Child Sexual Abuse 133, 138 (2008).

<sup>ix</sup> David Finkelhor et al., *Sexually Assaulted Children: National Estimates and Characteristics, Nat'l Incidence Studies of Missing, Abducted, Runaway, and Thrownaway Children*, Off. of Justice Programs (Aug. 2008).



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<sup>x</sup> *Chase Sec. Corp. v. Donaldson*, 325 U.S. 304, 311–12 (1945).

<sup>xi</sup> *Landgraf v. USI Film Prods.*, 511 U.S. 244, 272–73 (1994).

<sup>xii</sup> *Twomey v. Carlton House of Providence, Inc.*, 320 A.2d 98, 101–02 (R.I. 1974) (upholding explicitly retroactive amendment reviving time-barred personal injury claim); *see also Dandeneau v. Bd. of Governors for Higher Educ.*, 491 A.2d 1011, 1012 (R.I. 1985) (upholding retroactive amendment to statute of limitations as constitutional); *Spagnoulo v. Bisceglia*, 473 A.2d 285 (R.I. 1984) (retroactive application of Uniform Law on Paternity did not violate due process).

<sup>xiii</sup> *Id.* at 875–76.

<sup>xiv</sup> *See Theta Prop. v. Ronci Realty Co.*, 814 A.2d 907, 915 (R.I. 2003) (statutes operate prospectively “unless it appears by clear, strong language or by necessary implication that the Legislature intended to give the statute retroactive effect” (emphasis in original)).

<sup>xv</sup> R.I. Gen. Laws § 9-1-51(a)(3).

<sup>xvi</sup> *R.I. Depositors Econ. Prot. Corp. v. Brown*, 659 A.2d 95, 103 (R.I. 1995).

<sup>xvii</sup> *Id.* at 101–04 (quoting *Brennan v. Kirby*, 529 A.2d 633, 640 (R.I. 1987)).

<sup>xviii</sup> *New York v. Ferber*, 458 U.S. 747, 757 (1982); *see also State v. Taylor*, 562 A.2d 445, 454–55 (R.I. 1989).

<sup>xix</sup> *See, e.g., Sliney v. Previte*, 473 Mass. 283, 295–97 (2015) (no vested right in expired statute of limitations; retroactive extension to thirty-five years constitutional); *Roman Catholic Archbishop of Wash. v. Doe*, 330 A.3d 1069, 1075, 1102 (Md. 2025) (expiration of ordinary statute of limitations does not create a vested right); *Sheehan v. Oblates of St. Francis de Sales*, 15 A.3d 1247, 1258–60 (Del. 2011); *Doe v. Hartford Roman Catholic Diocesan Corp.*, 119 A.3d 462, 496 (Conn. 2015).

<sup>xx</sup> *see, e.g., Ball v. Roman Catholic Bishop of Manchester*, No. 2024-0606 (N.H. 2025) (N.H. Const. pt. I, art. 23); *Aurora Pub. Schs. v. A.S.*, 2023 CO 39 (Colo. Const. art. II, § 11).