



OHIO
SEN. NO. 226

MAY 31, 2022



SENATE
JUDICIARY

EXTENDS PERIOD OF LIMITATION FOR CHILD ABUSE OR NEGLECT

Ohio bill: New chance at justice for child sex abuse victims

THE OHIO CHANNEL® | IDEASTREAM® | COPYRIGHT 2022

by: [Maeve Walsh](#)

Posted: Jun 1, 2022 / 09:10 AM EDT

Updated: Jun 1, 2022 / 09:10 AM EDT

SHARE



COLUMBUS, Ohio (WCMH) – A former altar boy abused by a Cincinnati priest spoke publicly before lawmakers for the first time Tuesday – six months after his Catholic perpetrator was sentenced to seven years in prison.

Paul Neyer, 43, said he was eight years old when he was first raped by [Father Geoff Drew](#), 60, while serving as an altar boy at St. Ignatius of Loyola in Green Township. The former priest, who continued to assault Neyer until he was 10, pleaded guilty to nine counts of rape in December.

[Ohio bill would allow armed, trained school staff >](#)

Now, Neyer — who encouraged lawmakers to focus on the red-haired picture of his 8-year-old self rather than the “big, beefy” 43-year-old who stood before them — is fighting to expand the amount of time in which survivors of child sex abuse can obtain a sliver of justice.

“There was a fear of being deemed broken that kept the weight of the world on my shoulders, and any chance at advancement in life remained overshadowed by the evil I endured as a child,” Neyer said. “It took almost 30 years to tell another that I was raped.”

Average childhood sex abuse victim doesn't come forward until 52

Lawmakers on the Senate Judiciary Committee listened to Neyer's story Tuesday during the second hearing on [Senate Bill 226](#), a bill that aims to give childhood survivors of sexual violence more time to criminally charge their perpetrators.

Under current Ohio law, once a childhood sexual abuse victim turns 18, they have 25 years to file criminal charges against a perpetrator, allowing them to prosecute until the age of 43.

[Ohio lawmakers debate proposed 'Don't Say Gay' bill during first hearing >](#)

SB 226, introduced by Senators Stephanie Kunze (R-Hilliard) and Nickie Antonio (D-Lakewood) in September 2021, would extend that period by eight years, meaning the statute of limitations clock won't start ticking until age 26. This would give victims an opportunity to file criminal charges until the age of 51.

“The current statute of limitations starts at 18,” said Chris Graham, a childhood sex abuse survivor and one of the leading proponents of reforming Ohio’s statute of limitation laws. “We said, ‘Well, actually, the human brain doesn’t fully develop until 26.’”

While 86% of child sexual abuse goes unreported nationwide, victims and survivors who choose to report don’t come forward until an average age of 52, according to a March 2020 report from the child protection think tank Child USA.

‘Unconstitutional’ maps pushed forward to Ohio primary by federal court



71°

“I can tell you that everyone’s path to healing and finding their voice is different, and you cannot put a timeline on it for victims of such awful crimes as being sexually abused, especially as a child,” Neyer said. “Eliminating or expanding the SOL laws for child sex abuse survivors allows them the time they need.”

Like Neyer, Graham was also sexually assaulted by a priest while serving as an altar boy at St. Joan of Arc Catholic Church in Powell. After coming out as a survivor at the age of 38, Graham said he was eight years too late, under current Ohio law, to file a civil lawsuit to recover monetary damages for his assaults.

Ohio Statehouse: Students spark self-defense education bill



Now that his perpetrator is dead, criminal charges are also off the table.

“When there’s a statute of limitations, it puts friction on that process,” Graham told NBC4 in March. “It prevents people from coming forward because there’s – they know they’re going to be met with rejection, they know they’re going to be met with shame.”

Repealing SOLs could bring bankruptcy, ‘unbelievable amount of money to settle claims’

Opponents of repealing or expanding the civil statute of limitations have expressed concern that institutions facing abuse claims could be seriously damaged.

While discussing former [House Bill 249](#), which sought to allow sex abuse victims of former Ohio State University physician Dr. Richard Strauss to sue the university, Rep. Bill Seitz (R-Green Township) said in October 2021 that opening the door for more people to sue could hurt the ability of charitable organizations to carry out their mission.

[One dead after shooting reported at Ohio Statehouse](#) >

“If you look around the country, you will find many Catholic dioceses that have gone bankrupt as the result of decisions in other states to suspend the statute of limitations,” Seitz said. “You will find that the Boy Scouts are paying an unbelievable amount of money to settle claims.”

During a September 2019 testimony opposing HB 249, the Ohio Alliance for Civil Justice argued that statutes of limitations are vital to any legal system, as they “create certainty, discourage unnecessary delays and protect the integrity of the legal system by setting the outermost limit of time for a valid legal claim to be filed.”

“Statutes of limitation help assure that evidence has not been lost, witnesses are available, and accurate testimony can be given since an individual’s memory may fade over time,” the Ohio Alliance for Civil Justice wrote in its testimony.

[Dollar General in Trotwood robbed](#) >

Sen. Niraj Antani (R-Miamisburg) asked Graham, who testified before the committee, what he thought about concerns that removing or expanding the statute of limitations could lead to challenges in court – as memories fade over time and witnesses may die or move away by the time a victim comes forward.

Graham argued that it's not a legislature's job to determine whether a victim's case can stand before a judge.

"If someone wants to bring a case and has no evidence, we should be able to deal with that in court," Graham said.

Similar House bill is the 'gold standard' for statute of limitation reform, Graham says

A similar yet more encompassing bill pending in the House would take the provisions of SB 226 a step further – extending both the criminal and civil statutes of limitations for victims and survivors of all ages, according to the bill's text.

In Graham's eyes, [House Bill 266](#), sponsored by Reps. Jessica Miranda (D-Forest Park) and Kristin Boggs (D-Columbus), is the "gold standard" for reforming the rights of survivors. HB 266 would entirely eliminate the statute of limitations for criminally prosecuting rape, regardless of a person's age. For civil lawsuits concerning child sex abuse victims, the bill allows survivors cause for civil action until they're 55 years old – a significant extension from the current 30-year age cap.

[‘They lost him’: USPS misroutes father’s cremated remains](#) >

But given the conservative makeup of the Ohio Statehouse, Graham said lawmakers with whom he is working settled for introducing a less comprehensive bill, viewing the bipartisan-sponsored SB 266 as taking "a tiny bite out of the apple" in order to get the bill approved for a second hearing.

"You can't pass a bill in the House without a Republican co-sponsor," Graham said. "Well, you can, but it is gonna be a miracle."

[Suggest a Correction](#)