



THE LANTERN

STRAUSS VICTIM WRITES PERSONAL LETTER IN LIGHT OF POTENTIAL STATUTE OF LIMITATIONS LEGISLATION

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Trent Petrie, a victim of sexual abuse from former Ohio State physician Richard Strauss, wrote a letter to the Ohio House in support of a bill that would allow victims to sue the university. Credit: Courtesy of TNS

As a bill that would allow victims of former Ohio State physician Richard Strauss to sue the university makes its way through committee, one victim wrote a personal letter in support of the bill to Ohio lawmakers.

The letter — received by Ohio House Speaker Larry Householder Tuesday, according to his office — was also addressed to Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine, Attorney General Dave Yost and Ohio Senate President Larry Obhof, who did not respond by the time of publication.

The Feb. 9 letter was written by Trent Petrie, a member of the men's volleyball team from 1983 to '85. In the letter, he said it was common knowledge among student-athletes that "something was just not right" with Strauss.

Petrie also wrote a letter with victim Mike Avery in November to the Department of Education asking for an investigation into the university's closed Sexual Civility and Empowerment Unit — a former center for survivors of sexual violence — which shut down in 2018.

"During my first year on the team, as we lined up in the training room for our beginning of the year physicals, my teammates nervously joked with the new players that this would be particularly 'physical,'" the letter reads.

According to an investigation by Perkins Coie, LLP, Strauss abused at least 177 students and student-athletes during his time as team doctor and physician from 1978 to '98. The investigation also found that Ohio State knew of Strauss' abuse and failed to act at the time.

At least 17 Strauss-related lawsuits have been filed against the university, Ben Johnson, university spokesperson, said in an email dated Feb. 3. Judge Michael H. Watson ordered mediation to begin in March 2019, according to previous Lantern reporting, but there has been no resolution.

The letter comes after the Ohio House Civil Justice Committee resumed hearings on House Bill 249 Feb. 12, which would waive the statute of limitations — the time limit on when a victim can pursue legal action — for Strauss victims to file lawsuits against Ohio State.

Petrie said in the letter that he believes one reason there has been neither legislation nor mediation is because Strauss' victims were young men.

"Ohio State's lack of a response reflects archaic beliefs about masculinity," the letter reads. "Men can't really be sexually abused, can they? If they are, it really won't affect them, will it? If it does affect them, certainly it would not be the same as if it happened to a child or a woman, right?"

Johnson said in an email that Ohio State declined to comment because the letter was not addressed to the university.

The letter compares Ohio State's handling of Strauss accusations to Michigan State's response to victims of Larry Nassar, the former USA Gymnastics national team doctor and Michigan State physician who abused at least 160 women and girls. Nassar was sentenced to between 40 and 175 years in Michigan state prison in 2018.

“These women were treated with dignity and respect and empowered to share their stories, experiences and recovery because of the support they received from the public, the courts, each other, family, etc.” the letter reads. “As one of those who has made the decision to be public, I am asking you to help all of the former male athletes at Ohio State receive the same support, care, compassion, respect, and compensation that the female athletes at Michigan State have.”

Petrie, now a sports psychologist at the University of North Texas, said in the letter that he felt compelled to speak publicly about Strauss’ abuse because he was “tired of seeing athletes (and people) needlessly suffer” because of being conditioned to not show vulnerability.

“To live consistently with my beliefs and the message I share with athletes every day, I could not, in good conscience, remain silent on this topic,” the letter reads. “Wrestling with the decision to share my story has brought home to me, in a visceral way, how the stigma and shame that exists around such issues can leave us disempowered, closeted, and silent...many, many times suffering alone.”

Petrie ended the letter by asking again for the offices of the attorney general, governor, senate president and house speaker to pass legislation and hold Ohio State accountable for what it “allowed to happen.” He said in the letter that following Michigan State’s example will send the message that sexual abuse of any person is intolerable, including male victims.

“[M]en also deserve to be protected,” the letter reads. “When they find the courage to speak out, their voices will be heard and their stories believed.”