

Testimony on SB19-049 – 6 February 2019

My name is Jeb Barrett, a resident of Aurora.

Since I moved to Colorado in 2005, I have served as the volunteer Leader of the Denver Chapter of the 30-year-old Survivors Network, better known as SNAP, an international network of over 25,000 survivors and supporters.

I am here today to speak in support of Senate Bill 19-049 because I am a victim-survivor of sexual violation and abuse as a child and a teenager. I am here today because, as a survivor, I will never know what is like to grow up without being sexually violated.

The nationwide crisis of unreported sexual assault, particularly of minors, is of personal concern because I know that my parents, the teachers and therapist to whom I confided my abuse never reported the crimes to civil authorities.

As the result of simply removing offenders without reporting, countless other children were easily accessed by these predators.

One example resulted in the quiet “disappearance” of a beloved scout master and another was the quick firing of my organ teacher at the University of Montana in the summer following my sophomore year in high school. When I told, the Dean of the School of Music, he said he would take care of it and to tell no one. However, when I told my father, he contacted the U of M administration; Dr. Arnold and his wife were given one week to leave town, or my dad would report the assault to the police. This man, like so many others, went on to another community and prey.

If this crime had been reported and possibly prosecuted and exposed, I would not have learned years later that he had a reputation of “having a way with little boys” in Columbia, Missouri.

That breaks my heart.

Among other things, I am a retired Mental Health and Addictions Counselor. In that role, I have learned how very difficult and shaming it is to talk about rape and sexual assault, especially when we hear messages like “you’re just imagining, he’s a good man and would never do anything like that” or “if you tell anyone, you will ruin his life, that’s in the past, now get over it” or, “what did you do to cause it?”

In my work at Excelsior Youth Center, a residential program for youth 13 to 17 with behavioral and legal problems in Spokane, Washington in the early 90s we identified that 93% of the girls and 68% of the boys had been sexually violated.

In 2001, I asked the director what the statistics were. His response was “100% of both boys and girls.”

Let me tell you, victims never get over it; the betrayal and loss of innocence at such an early age stays with us for a lifetime, and too many victims take their own lives when these unresolved childhood traumas become unbearable and isolating. Many turn to alcohol, drugs, crime, sex or other addictive behaviors in attempt to self-medicate and wipe out internal pain.

I became a therapist primarily to dedicate my life to suicide prevention, not only others’ but also my own. However, I didn’t seriously address the debilitating affects of childhood trauma until I started retiring in 2002, at age 63.

Society today needs two things: strict enforcement of mandatory reporting statutes and the removal of archaic, predator-friendly Statutes of Limitation for sexual assault of minors, with a Window for Justice in the civil statute to enable time-barred victims to expose predators and gain access to the proven American justice system.

Senator Fields’ bill is a significant step toward better protecting the vulnerable and offering healing to the afflicted.

In closing, I have two things to say:

1. Anyone who has grown up without being sexually violated has no idea of what it is like to be so betrayed.
2. And, today I ask every administrator, clergy person, teacher, therapist, officer or lawmaker, “Are you more interested in protecting children or sexual predators?” Victim-survivors await your answer.” For the sake of the kids, the vulnerable and voiceless, I await your response.

Thank you for your time and attention.

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