

**Testimony to House Committee on Judiciary
Chair, Rep. Fred Patton
Hearing: February 11, 2020, 3:30pm Room 346-S**

Position: Support HB 2306

Studies show only about 1/3 of victims of childhood sexual abuse disclosed during childhood (Hébert et al, 2009; Schönbucher et al, 2012). Some reasons for not disclosing include: fear, shame, self-blame and feeling powerless. You feel shame that it happened and fear what will happen if you report it. You really just want to pretend it didn't or isn't happening.

As a survivor myself, I know that I organized my life to remain as safe as possible. By reporting this crime, I'd upset the fragile balance of my life. I feared it will make me more a target of abuse. The abuser has all the power, who is most likely abusive to others in the house. Avoidance and denial became my best friends.

When you are a minor and you report, you likely will be removed from the home or at least you believe this. In the small town where I lived, I knew the foster homes for teenagers and I did not want to live there. I thought why should I have to leave my nice middle class home where there were known dangers to live amongst the unknown. So I decided to stay quiet and deal with it on my own.

Also as a child, it is not only your story that you are telling. It is also the story of your family. There are others to consider how it will impact them. It's a heavy task, that a child will be the one who shares this family's story. Until we can erase the shame and stigma that accompanies childhood sexual abuse, this will not change. In fact, even sharing my story today, I considered who might be impacted by my testimony.

These are all difficult issues for a child to deal with. Therefore, it is often adulthood before you are able to disclose and deal with how others respond when you tell your story. People view you differently and you can feel their discomfort when you share.

In closing, I want to tell all those who have been the victims of childhood sexual violence, please know that this does not define you. This experience does change you but you are much more.

Please support HB 2306 and give victims another tool to use to combat childhood sexual abuse.

Thank you,
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References

- Schönbucher, V., Maier, T., Mohler-Kuo, M., Schnyder, U., Landolt, M. A. (2012). Disclosure of child sexual abuse by adolescents: A Qualitative In-depth study. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 27(17), 3486-3513.
- Hébert, M., Tourigny, M., Cyr, M., McDuff, P., & Joly, J. (2009). Prevalence of childhood sexual abuse and timing of disclosure in a representative sample of adults from Quebec. *The Canadian Journal of Psychiatry*, 54(9), 631-636.