



Joseph Baldacci  
Senator, District 9

**THE MAINE SENATE**  
131st Legislature

3 State House Station  
Augusta, Maine 04333

Testimony of Senator Joe Baldacci introducing

LD 1790 "An Act Removing the Statute of Limitations on Criminal and Civil Actions Involving Sexual Abuse of Minors "

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary

May 10, 2023

Good afternoon Senator Carney, Representative Moonen, and Distinguished Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary I am Senator Joe Baldacci, and I represent Senate District 9, which is made up of *Bangor and Hermon* I am here today to present LD 1790, "An Act Removing the Statute of Limitations on Criminal and Civil Actions Involving Sexual Abuse of Minors "

It is imperative that this committee and the State of Maine abolish the statute of limitations for child sexual assault Sexual assault at any age is not an easy crime to report It involves giving one's self over entirely to the judicial system and law enforcement in the aspirational hope that they will do the right thing, that you will be believed as a victim, and that the status of an offender, including their station in the community, will not matter to the impartial administration of justice When former US House Speaker Dennis Hastert was accused of child sexual assault as a teacher and wrestling coach in Illinois, the story seemed unbelievable to every single person who heard it, except, of course, his victims Long-time Illinois Attorney General Lisa Madigan, who knew Hastert, was equally as shocked In deciding to immediately work with the Illinois Legislature to end the statute of limitations on child sexual assault, both civilly and criminally, in Illinois, Madigan reflected, of victims, that "for decades they struggle to come to terms with the terrible impacts these crimes have on their lives - including the troubling fact that few of the perpetrators are ever held accountable " It took significant tragedy in Illinois to compel change, as it too often does

I ask you to consider the following statistics, all sourced from the Maine Coalition Against Sexual Assault one in five Mainers will experience sexual assault in their lifetime, accounting for approximately 14,000 of our citizens However, in 2019, only 514 sexual abuse matters were reported to Maine law enforcement That would mean approximately 3.6% of cases were reported, and the reason for that is the abject trauma victims must live with before, during, and after coming forward

One in five women have been the victim of attempted or completed rape in their lifetime - and one in four minor males have experienced sexual violence in their lifetime Persons under 18 years of age

account for 67% of all sexual assault victimizations reported to law enforcement agencies. Shockingly, children under twelve years old are at least 34% of these cases, worse yet, children under six account for at least 14% of these cases. Those are brutally, painfully sobering statistics, and are demonstrative of why we must abolish the statute of limitations surrounding this horrific crime. It is cruel to expect victims to come forward on an arbitrary timetable set by the state, and it is also unrealistic. Think about the following numbers: while 5% of child sexual assaults were reported to school authorities, 86% of the sexual assaults against children in Maine went unreported, year over year. Persons under 18 who are by any measure differently abled have an even higher rate of unreported abuse. These numbers are intolerable, and as a Legislature, we have a moral obligation to protect children, and to do so now, by eliminating the criminal and civil statutes of limitations during this Legislative session, without further delay. Maine's rural counties have children at even greater risk, since in communities where everyone knows each other - and that is virtually every community in Maine - the chances of a report being made against an offender by a child are almost non-existent.

It's a simple proposition: victims deserve justice in both criminal and civil venues. No one should be able to perpetrate this evil and simply walk away, confident that time is on their side - and as we sit here, time is indeed, on their side. I urge you to read the testimony provided in support of this bill. I urge you to listen to what you will hear today, and send this bill out of Committee to the floor and to the Governor's desk before one more child is victimized.

Thank you for your time and consideration, I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.