

Mark Petersen  
Falmouth

State of Maine  
Support in Favor of LD 688

My name is Mark Petersen. I have resided in Maine all my life. I am a retired Elementary School Principal of 29 years. Over my career as a classroom teacher and principal I had many opportunities to deal with children who have experienced sexual abuse, their parents, support professionals and the insidious ramifications of the effects of this abuse on all parties.

A major emphasis in our school was to protect and ensure the safety and well being of all of our students. At the forefront of these efforts was regular work with the York County Child Abuse and Neglect Council. We held many assembly programs featuring professional theatre groups as well as concerts and puppet shows featuring Rick Charette. Throughout all these activities, an unequivocal message we emphasized was that you can always find a trusted adult for help; someone who will believe you and keep you safe. It used to break our hearts when a child would self report their abuse. Being able to support those children was the just the start of a long process of healing. It was often disconcerting to realize that in many cases, it was anticipated that the abuser had abused others as well, many of whom would never be known and would suffer in silence.

From my training in recognizing the signs, symptoms, and ramifications of childhood sexual abuse, it is also a fact that perpetrators were often abused as children. This abused to abuser cycle is well documented which was why, in my opinion, it is so critical that we empower children in order to break the cycle years ahead of when it may be manifested. The importance of identifying perpetrators of this heinous crime, ensuring that victims are provided with resources to help them with what may become a life-long need is currently missing a critical piece; the ability to hold child sexual abusers accountable whenever and to whomever they have acted. Simply put, abusers should have no expectation or comfort in knowing that they are “off the hook” at anytime in their life. Indeed, any crime which steals the healthy life of another human being should be on par with murder. When such a crime is uncovered, a legal evidentiary based process should be in place to ensure that justice is served.

I have heard and understand the opposing view of this-that a years old case and subsequent charges may be impossible to adjudicate fairly. In my opinion, erring on the side of healing and seeing justice served far outweighs the possibility of a grown adult vindictively bringing such charges against an abuser who may be elderly. A strong message to abusers that they will never be free of prosecution may serve as a deterrent. It also reinforces what society needs to say: that the health, safety and well being of our children is paramount and un-compromised by any hint of “Sorry, you’re too late to get any relief”.

The Catholic Diocese, as an opponent to this bill has a pathetic and sordid past in its effort to cover up systemic abuse. Their voice in determining the outcome of this bill should be dismissed on its face without debate.

Respectfully submitted,

Mark and Rochelle Petersen  
Falmouth, ME