

Testimony for North Dakota House Bill 1384 by Paul Hessinger, Feb 3, 2021

People ask why survivors don't come forward sooner. Many do! I did! I told my high school principal, who was a priest. He did not receive it well. He was doing damage control. He never asked me if I was okay. He apparently told no one, and nothing happened.

I was confused, felt ashamed for reasons I didn't understand at the time, and I was anxious and afraid my peers would spread this around. I was mortified to be connected with this kind of thing that was so shocking and jarring as a kid. I lost my faith and had to find it years later.

I had no consciousness of lawsuits or suing anyone at that age. I had little money. I thought no one would believe me anyway, as I was a kid and they were adults. I tried to report it. The results were disheartening. At times I was ashamed and made to feel embarrassed. No one really listened or acted on my behalf.

I did not have the necessary worldview to see the bigger picture, to see that it was a crime, that legal justice could happen. I also did not even realize the emotional damage that had been inflicted on me.

My experience at every turn is that the justice system, courts, legislatures, police and the entire system seem to protect the predators, allowing them to roam free to abuse again. But there seems little protection for the survivors or future victims. Survivors coming forward encounter steep hurdles and roadblocks. Why? Why would anyone support that?