

January 8, 2023

Dear Chairman Klemin and Committee Members,

My name is Paula Rebsom and I am the sister of A [REDACTED] R [REDACTED] who has played a major part in helping to draft HB 1145 which will give victims of sexual assault suffering from a debilitating mental condition time to seek treatment before the statute of limitation clock runs out.

First, it is important to understand why many survivors of sexual assault are unable to come forward within the 3-year statute of limitation law currently in place in North Dakota. Research from the National Center for PTSD, part of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, suggests that “almost one-third of all rape victims have at least one period of Major Depressive Disorder (MMD) in during their lives.... that last for a long period of time.”. Studies also estimate that “one-third of women who are raped contemplate suicide, and 13% of rape victims actually attempt suicide”. The statistics are similar for those suffering from PTSD which often causes them to have repeated thoughts of the assault, nightmares, difficulty sleeping and concentrating. Victims may also suffer Acute Stress Disorder, and experience anger, shame and guilt, social problems, sexual problems, and alcohol and drug use.

Second, it is also important to note that not every survivor of sexual assault suffers from, or experiences, all of these outcomes. Every survivor processes the trauma differently and in differing time frames. For my sister, the sexual assaults at age 10 and 18 resulted in severe PTSD and multiple suicide attempts when she was younger. It took my sister until she was in her 40's to achieve the life stability and emotional foundation needed to seek and find treatment to address her PTSD which she is still suffering from today.

Finally, imagine suffering from even just one of the conditions listed above and then being told you have 3 years from the assault to be healthy enough to testify at a trial, as is required under the law, or you will be unable to prosecute the assailant. Being assaulted does not give you a free pass to suddenly put the rest of your life on hold while you seek intensive treatment. Many have to process the trauma while holding down one or more jobs, going to school, caring for children or other family members,

and attempting to live “normal lives”. They also may not be able to access adequate treatment where they live or simply can’t afford it. In addition to providing an unreasonable barrier for survivors to seek justice, the current statute of limitations gives the perpetrator a free pass to continue to sexually assault others.

I want to thank everyone who has played a role in drafting and supporting this important legislation and call specific attention to my sister’s bravery and tireless efforts in working to get this legislation drafted, despite not being eligible to receive the benefit of it because it is not retroactive. I ask you to stand alongside her in supporting this bill with a DO PASS vote so that her efforts are not in vain, and countless victims of future sexual assaults will not have to struggle the way A [REDACTED] has in order to seek justice only to find out it’s too late for them.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Paula Rebsom", written in black ink on a light-colored background.

Paula Rebsom (Seattle, WA)