

March 14th, 2023

Dear Chairman Larson and Committee Members,

My name is Paula Rebsom and I am the sister of A [REDACTED] R [REDACTED], whom you have also heard testimony from this session. I want to be able to stand here today and tell you I fully support this bill. Extending the current statute of limitations for criminal cases involving sexual assault from 3 years to 7 for victims over the age of 18 is certainly a small step in the right direction. But why take a small step when you have the power to take a big step forward! "According to the FBI, rape (a felony sex crime) is the second-most serious crime, just behind murder. About 10 states have abolished statutes of limitations for all felony sex crimes to allow a perpetrator to be prosecuted at any point, as long as there's enough evidence to win a conviction." ([RAINN.org](https://rainn.org)) The biggest step forward would of course be to remove the SOL entirely. However, if you must put a time-limit on an adult victims right to seek justice I ask that you consider matching it with that of juveniles in the state of North Dakota who have 21 years after their assault to pursue criminal charges.

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 (or even the 7-year extension proposed in this bill). According to a 2019 fact sheet from ChildUSA.org "The average age for disclosure is 52 years-old.". Additionally, 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) 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". For example, my sister attempted suicide multiple times in her late teens, and at age 47 is still suffering from severe PTSD as a result of two sexual assaults. Once at the age of 10 from a school custodian and the other at the age of 18 from a male nurse during a hospital stay in the ICU after attempting suicide because of the prior rape. It has taken her this long to be able to begin the process of healing from this trauma and finding ways to cope with it through intensive therapy.

Imagine being sexually assaulted at the age of 18 (or let's say 44 which is my current age) and then being told you have 3 years, or 7 as currently proposed in this bill, 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 sexual assault survivors 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. These short and arbitrary time frames force a survivor of sexual assault to put their life on hold in order to seek justice. It is not only unfair and inhumane, it is unequitable. They did not ask to be violated in this way and they should not be punished further by being forced into seeking justice outside of their own terms when they have the time, financial resources, and or coping skills necessary to face their preparator in trial.

We are aware that bill is not retro-active and that my sister will not be able to benefit from any changes that occur to the criminal statute of limitations presented in it. Instead, we stand here today sharing and reliving her traumatic and personal story in order to urge you, as lawmakers for the people of North Dakota, to create a bill that would finally recognize survivors of sexual assault as human beings that require time to process severe trauma on their own terms, instead of as victims that must conform to arbitrary SOLs. Please stop asking survivors of sexual assault and their families to continually show up to legislative sessions and beg you for more time to heal in order to be strong enough to face their preparators in court. You have the power today as lawmakers, to take this necessary step in providing sexual assault survivors with the support they need in order to seek justice on their terms, which in the end benefits all of us. I urge you to not only support this bill, but to consider a much larger extension beyond 7 years.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Paula Rebsom".

Paula Rebsom (Seattle, WA)