

# North Dakota testimony for House Bill 1382

## Statute of Limitation Reform

**Tim Lennon**

### **Introduction**

My name is Tim Lennon. I am a survivor of sexual abuse when I was twelve years old. I was violently raped by my parish priest in Sioux City, Iowa, about 1960.

I presently live in Tucson, Arizona.

### **My Story**

My story is relevant to House Bill 1382 as memories of the rape remained buried for fifty years. Memories surfaced when my twin daughters turned twelve, which evoked memories of the rape when I was twelve.

### **My Advocacy Background**

I am the President of the Board of Directors of the *Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests*, [SNAPnetwork.org](http://SNAPnetwork.org)

SNAP is a peer network of over 30,000 survivors and supporters and is a 501(c)3 non-profit. SNAP was founded thirty years ago. The mission is to support survivors, protect the vulnerable, and hold predators accountable.

I have been an active volunteer and national leader in SNAP for the previous ten years. Most of my volunteer work was as a correspondent for the SNAP website. I have spoken to or written to many thousands of survivors of sexual abuse over the years. During my time as SNAP leadership, I have engaged with several state leaders to advocate reform of SOL laws in Iowa, South Dakota, Arizona, and Louisiana.

My advocacy for justice and accountability has led me to an international meeting in Dublin, Ireland. I also traveled to the Vatican twice as part of a SNAP team to call for reform; the latest visit was one year ago. I have been interviewed by all major media, both nationally and internationally. These

include the whole range of media, national newspapers, network TV news, magazines, radio, and hundreds of other media outlets.

I have a blog with a considerable amount of information about my story and background. I have other supporting material that is helpful for other victims and survivors.

<https://standupspeakup.org/>

## **Support of Bill 1382**

I submit the following as my testimony in support of House Bill 1382. I plan to give oral testimony as well in response to any of my statements.

## **Issues, questions, and challenges concerning SOL reform**

**Part 1 Reply to the suggestion that the preponderance of evidence is so low in civil cases that many 'innocent' people will be dragged into court.**

*Thank heavens we have a jury system of assessment guilt or innocence by peers. Every case, not settled previously, goes before a jury. I trust the jury system; I ask that legislators trust the jury system.*

*We have a system of judges and juries. Let us not avoid or deny accountability based upon a 'fear' of misuse. The process is not a one way street for victims. According to federal statistics, the rate of false accusations is limited to 2%.*

See <http://www.bishop-accountability.org/AtAGlance/data.htm>, point #9

<https://www.nationalcac.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/False-allegations-of-sexual-abuse-by-children-and-adolescents.pdf>

*The good citizens of the jury protect us to assess any testimony and resulting guilt or innocence.*

**Part 2 Many ask why can't victims report previously to seek justice?**

*When I was violently raped at age twelve by my parish priest, it caused lifelong harm. The effects of PTSD remain to this day, sixty years later. Memories of the life-threatening rape remained buried for fifty years. Memories surfaced when my twin daughters turned twelve, which evoked memories of the violence and rape I suffered when I was twelve.*

**CHILDDUSA.org/SOL** research shows the average age of a victim of child sex abuse is 52.

*Other causes for the delay in reporting:*

- *Many suffer from the unwanted feelings of guilt and shame that burdens so many victims. Victim-shaming is, sadly, a cultural blot on our society. Some victims are humiliated and shunned by others.*
- *Tied to shaming is self-blaming where the victim laments actions; could I have done more to fight back?*
- *Some worry that others would take action; for example, a child victim might not report because they believe the father would kill the perpetrator—more than one victim has mentioned this fear to me.*
- *Victims have a fear that no one will believe them. Predators groom the victim and groom the parents and those around the victim. Predators cultivate charm and good nature, the priest who raped me, was a friendly, smiling, joking Irishman. A victim may fear that they will not be believed. Or they may believe it was their fault.*
- *The predator may be a family member that the victim does not want to be ostracized by the family or cause divisions in the family.*
- *The victim's job or professional standing may be harmed if they step forward. Job loss is a real threat and can be used as intimidation.*
- *Tragically rape and sexual assault are a direct attack on self-worth so that a victim may be so beat down and depressed that reporting is not seen as an option. I have seen this tragedy many times.*
- *The psychological effects may be so dramatic that the victim's harm is pushed aside, disassociated.*
- *Social stigma and humiliation discourage the most vulnerable.*

**<https://lacasacenter.org/why-child-abuse-victims-dont-tell/>**

**<https://medium.com/survivors/this-is-why-i-kept-sexual-abuse-secrets-for-20-years-59c71cc6b20d>**

**Part 3 Will a civil suit hurt the victim? Will they have to re-live the horrors of memories of sexual violence? I believe SOL reform helps them.**

*Yes. It is incredibly difficult for a victim to come forward to name the crime and the criminal. Yes, it can be emotionally challenging. That is why, as mentioned previously, most cases are settled out of court previous to jury trials.*

*While holding a predator and an institution accountable for their crimes can be difficult, we must weigh that challenge to the benefit that a successful case may bring support to needed therapy.*

*Keep in mind that speaking up, fighting back through civil court action is an integral part of healing. A victim can move forward to a survivor who begins to determine his or her future.*

*Filing a lawsuit is voluntary. The victim weighs the challenges versus the benefits. Legislators should not take this choice away from the victim. And legislators should give opportunity for all victims to achieve justice.*

**Part 4 What kinds of evidence could be relevant after many years?**

*Once again, any lawsuit goes in front of a jury; they weigh the evidence.*

*Testimony is taken under oath of all parties. Subpoenas can be issued; records can be discovered. Previous correspondence, letters, photos, news articles, receipts are all evidence. Most institutions keep records, the Church, schools, Boy Scouts, etc. The FBI has commanded that the Catholic Church retain all their records.*

**<https://www.ydr.com/story/news/2018/10/26/catholic-priest-abuse-all-us-dioceses-now-included-federal-investigation/1779082002/>**

*All evidence is relevant! All parties have equal opportunity to present evidence.*

*It is worth repeating, very few cases ever go to trial. Very few.*

*The harm is lifelong. The raping and sexual violence are equivalent to murder. (The lifelong damage has had crippling effects for me for sixty years and will continue for the rest of my life.) There should be no limitation on SOL laws for child sexual violence, either criminal or civil.*

*Note Economic harm of \$830k:*

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0145213418303867>

[http://awrsipe.com/Click\\_and\\_Learn/2009-11-15\\_unspeakable\\_damage.html](http://awrsipe.com/Click_and_Learn/2009-11-15_unspeakable_damage.html)

## **Part 5 Too much of 'he said--she said,' or let the jury decide.**

*Please note, the essential element for victims is justice and accountability. There is an equal opportunity for a jury to assess the validity of both sides' testimony and evidence. I trust the jury system, and I ask that legislators put similar trust in this system.*

*We benefit from having testimony under oath for all parties as well as the power of subpoena.*

## **Part 6 Reply to the fear that the reform of Statute of Limitation laws will be a burden to the courts**

*Justice, accountability, and the rule of law must be the principal concern of any legal proceeding. Over 30 states have reformed their Statute of Limitation (SOL) laws in the last couple of years. **CHILDUSA.org/SOL** There have been no reported cases of the justice system overwhelmed by SOL reform. Typically, the vast majority of civil cases are settled out of court, maybe 90% or more. There is no burden placed on the state justice system of North Dakota. Seeking justice for the most horrific crime of child rape and sexual violence is not frivolous.*

## **Part 7 Is prevention the solution? Prison makes people worse.**

*If a violent predator rapes a child, why should we worry about it making them worse? What is worse than a child rapist?*

*Sexual violence and rape of children is equivalent to murder.*

*Yes, we should work on prevention. If you don't hold rapists and child molesters accountable, they will continue to rape and abuse for decades.*

## **Part 8 How does SOL reform prevent further sexual abuse of children? How does reform make our community safer?**

*Three facts are essential in understanding why there needs SOL reform and how SOL reform makes the community safer:*

*1. Sexual predators abuse for decades. Just last week, a 76 year old man was convicted of sexually molesting boys.*

*<https://patch.com/rhode-island/narragansett/former-ri-boy-scout-leader-gets-40-years-sexual-assaults>*

*2. Most child rape and sexual violence victims never come forward, maybe as high as 70%. See links and rationale in Part 3 above.*

*3. If they sexually abused one child, they have abused dozens.*

*Predators abuse victims children for a lifetime, maybe eight to over a hundred victims abused. In my case, the predator who raped me had been caught three times, never reported. After I went public in 2016, fifteen of my classmates came forward as well.*

*A minister, a priest, athletic coach, a Boy Scout leader, teacher, or therapist who sexually preys on children rely on the many impediments to reporting by victims. They can just wait out the clock to gain immunity from prosecution, which, in turn, leads to a 'get out of jail card' for the predator.*

*The community is threatened by a lifetime of sexual abuse of children.*

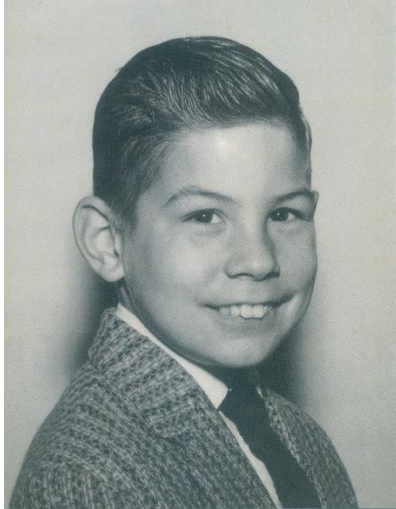
## **MY STORY**

I was raped and sexually abused by a priest, Fr. Murphy, in Sioux City, Iowa, when I was twelve. The abuse continued for several months; the abuse stopped due to Murphy getting caught abusing another child. He was removed and transferred from the parish and moved on. Murphy had been caught molesting children in three towns in Iowa (Danbury, Whittimore, and Fr. Dodge). The bishop transferred Murphy each time he got caught before coming to my parish and elementary school.

Memories of the rape and sexual molestation remained buried until 2010, fifty years later. I have the good fortune to have the support of my family, friends, and community. Together with therapy and SNAP support groups, I have been able to grow and thrive.

Picture of me at about the time of the rape and sexual abuse.





My blog, <https://standupspeakup.org/>, provides considerable background information. And there is documentation for those interested in seeking more information and help.

I am presently the President of the Board of Directors of the *Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests*. See: <https://www.snapnetwork.org/>

I submit this testimony as I want to make sure that what happened to me does not happen to another child.

I will be happy to reply to all questions, and I will be happy to respond to any request for more information.

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