

Written Testimony for Susan Leighnor, M.A. – March 23, 2023
SB 317 Permitting the prosecution of childhood sexual abuse

Good morning Madam Chair and Committee Members,

Thank you for having this hearing today on SB 317 for permitting the prosecution of childhood sexual abuse.

More importantly, thank you for considering my testimony about my childhood sexual abuse in Kansas.

My name is Susan Leighnor. I was born in Hutchinson, Kansas into a Catholic family. My family attended the Church of the Holy Cross. I attended Holy Cross Catholic School for first grade, fourth grade and CCD classes.

This is a photo of me in 1966 when I was 10 years old and in 4th grade.



Mass was always held in the morning before the school day began. After mass we would go back into the classrooms. One day after mass when I was 10 years old and in fourth grade, a boy came to our classroom and told my teacher, who was a nun, that I needed to go see Father, Monsignor Irvin F. Lampe. It was always an older boy who came to the classroom. He could have been an altar boy. I was led into the sacristy that was to the right of the altar where Monsignor Lampe was waiting for me. The boy went back out into the church and sat in a pew just outside the sacristy. As I stepped into the sacristy, Lampe was removing the white top he had worn during mass. He then sat down and pulled me close to him. He began talking to me about my parents getting a divorce. Lampe would go on to rape me.

After raping me, he held my hands and looked me in the face and told me that I was not going to talk about this. He told me this was like confession. We don't talk about what happens in confession so you are not going to talk about this. And if you do, you will go to hell.

I understood clearly that I could go to hell if I spoke about what had happened.

At some point, Lampe also told me that he was like God here on earth. If I was talking to him, I was, in fact, talking to God. This concept of a priest being God was not new to me. I learned throughout my catholic schooling that the priest was like God. I heard this many times from the nuns when I was in school.

I still remember the priest telling me to go back to class. So I walked back to my classroom, trying to straighten out my underpants as I walked down the hallway. I was confused, angry and unsure what had happened. I am sure I cried walking back to class. By the time I got back to class, I would have stuffed my tears because the nuns hated it when a child cried.

I was raped at least three times by Lampe. I know this because the first time I walked directly back to class. The second time, I decided to go into the restroom and straighten myself out. Another time, I stayed too long in the restroom and my teacher came looking for me. I had lost track of time. I remember standing at the sink, washing my hands, and the nun standing behind me talking, blah, blah, blah ...

One time when the boy came to class to get me, instead of walking out the door, I summoned the courage to walk up to the teacher's desk and tell her quietly that I did not want to go see Father. The nun looked at me and told me I had to go see Father. I told her again I did not want to go see Father. And again, she told me I had to go. As I walked out the door, I stopped and looked back over my shoulder at the teacher, hoping she would tell me not to go, but instead she told me I had to go, so I did.

The pattern was the same; the boy would come get me out of class and take me to the sacristy. The boy would sit in the pew. Lampe would shut the door.

I remember touching his penis.

One time, I struggled to get away from Lampe, but a 10 year old little girl is no match to a grown man.

Afterwards, I walked past the boy in the pew and returned to class.

Imagine, I was expected to continue learning for the rest of the day after being raped in the sacristy, by a man who was God here on earth. Let that sink in. For the rest of the day, I was expected to learn in class, have lunch with my friends, and play recess 3 times a day. And act as if nothing out of the ordinary had happened.

I was not the only child who was called to see the priest. I saw others get called to see him.

I never spoke about what happened to me to my parents, or anyone. Out of pure fear, I did not want to go to hell. This fear of going to hell was reinforced in me when a classmate, a little girl, was injured on the playground and died a day later. I remember thinking that I could die on the playground. And if I died on the playground, I did not want to go to hell.

You see, the concept of hell being a burning inferno with people screaming out in agony was real for me, and I certainly did not want to ever go to hell.

As the school year went on, Lampe was gone, or at least he was not at the school.

During this time, there were visiting priests who came to church and school. I was raped twice by an unknown visiting priest.

Towards the end of fourth grade, after mass, someone came to the classroom and told my teacher that Father wanted to see me. So I went to the sacristy. This time, Father Francis Cox was there. (He had said the morning mass before school.) As Cox sat in the chair, he called me over to come near him. He held out his arm and wrapped it around me. Cox told me he wanted to introduce me to the new priest who was going to take over when Father Lampe left. He motioned for me to sit on the bench to his left which I did. After I sat down, I noticed another priest across the room. Cox then introduced me to Father William Wheeler. After introducing me, Cox walked out of the room. I watched him leave and I was scared to death. I knew Cox but I did not know this new priest. Within a minute or two of meeting Wheeler, he was raping me.

There was no grooming involved with Wheeler. It was a full-on attack within a minute or two. The next thing I remember is Wheeler sitting close to me on my left side talking, blah blah, blah ... I was terrified.

Both Cox and Wheeler were Irish priests.

As I had done in the past, I went back to class...to learn...to eat lunch...to play recess.

A day or two later, as I was walking down the hall for recess, I was officially introduced to Wheeler by the principal. He was standing slightly behind her as she was talking. He gave me a stone-cold look that went right through me, as if to say, I will kill you if you say anything about meeting me before. I never said a word about meeting Wheeler or being raped.

I went to public schools after fourth grade.

I attended CCD class at Holy Cross when I was 12 years old. CCD was on Wednesdays after school. Early in the semester, after CCD class started, my teacher told me that Father wanted to see me. She said I was to go over to the rectory to see him. I had no choice, so I walked over and met with Wheeler. I was raped again by Wheeler. Afterwards, I walked back to the school and hid out in the bathroom until I left for home. I do not think I went back to the CCD classes ever again. I never told anyone what happened.

This was truly horrific. I was a 12 year old girl who had just begun menstruating several months before. Imagine, being a 12 year old girl and having a priest know that you are menstruating. It happened to me...

I repressed all the memories of my rapes by Lampe, Wheeler, and the visiting priest. Never to be spoken of until 50 years later when the memories returned. I was in my early 60s when I first

spoke of being raped in school. My repressed memories are the result of multiple traumatic events I endured as a child at Catholic school, i.e. sexual assault, rape and being terrorized.

According to the book “Unto Us A Child: Abuse and Deception in the Catholic Church” by Donald T. Phillips, Wheeler was known as a problem priest for years. He was a problem priest back in the 50s when he was sexually abusing children. Yet, he was sent to Holy Cross in Hutchinson in the 1960s and 70s.

As investigations continue around the country and details emerge about clergy abuse, i.e. Colorado and Pennsylvania, the Catholic Church was aware of sexual predators for decades in their churches and schools and continued to provide safe harbor for these priests. Their solution to problem priests was to move them around from parish to parish and school to school.

In good faith, my family trusted the church to teach and protect their daughter and granddaughter. The education I received from the church/school was not what my parents sent me to school to learn. No parent wants their child terrorized and abused the way I was terrorized and abused.

The Catholic Church and any institution that protects serial sexual predators should be held accountable for what happened under their roof. As in my case, I was raped multiple times in their sacristy and in their rectory. SB 317 will help lift the veil of secrecy that only serves to protect serial sexual predators, and the institutions and organizations that shield them from accountability.

According to research conducted by John Jay College, and issued in a report to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops in 2011, incidences of sexual abuse in the Catholic Church was highest between the mid-1960s and the mid-1980s. 94% of incidences of sexual abuse from 1950 through 2009 took place before 1990. Any amendment limiting or capping the time allotted for victims and survivors to report sexual abuse will, in fact, eliminate the most prolific years of sexual abuse in the catholic church.

All survivors of childhood sexual abuse must be able to find justice for the harm done to them, no matter how long it takes for a victim-survivor to come forward.

For these reasons, I support SB 317 and ask the Committee to vote “yes” to pass this critical piece of legislation.

Thank you for considering my testimony and for allowing me to share with you a painful, heartbreaking, and destructive part of my childhood.

Respectfully,
Susan Leighnor, M.A.

Read

The Causes and Context of Sexual Abuse of Minors By Catholic Priests in the United States, 1950-2010

A Report Presented to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops by the John Jay College Research Team

2011

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**State Clergy Abuse Reports, Summary, etc.
Victim and Predator Numbers**

State	Victims	Predators	Date
Colorado	166	43	10/22/2019
Report 1: https://coag.gov/app/uploads/2019/10/Special-Masters-Report_10.22.19_FINAL.pdf			
Pages: 263			
AG Video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uv4M9mgL5k			
Colorado	46	25	12/01/2020
Report 2: https://coag.gov/app/uploads/2020/12/12.1.20-Final-Catholic-clergy-child-sexual-abuse-supplemental-report.pdf			
Pages: 93			
AG Video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z3K6Hk4tTOo			
Kansas	400+	188	01/06/2023
Summary: https://ag.ks.gov/docs/default-source/documents/20230106-kbi-clergy-report.pdf?sfvrsn=695cbd1a_2			
Pages: 25			
Maryland	600+	158	11/17/2022
Motion: https://foxbaltimore.com/news/local/more-than-600-abuse-victims-identified-in-state-investigation-of-archdiocese-of-baltimore			
Pages: 35			
Missouri	Unknown	163	09/13/2019
Report: https://ago.mo.gov/docs/default-source/press-releases/2019/catholicchurchclergyabuseinvestigationreport.pdf			
Pages: 329			
AG Video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ad1sBUZ7PzQ			
Nebraska	258	57	11/04/2021
Report: https://ago.nebraska.gov/sites/ago.nebraska.gov/files/doc/Report%20of%20Clergy%20Sexual%20Abuse%20-%20November%204%20-%202021.pdf			
Pages: 182			
AG Video: https://journalstar.com/watch-now-attorney-general-details-report-on-clergy-abuse/video_80e723d0-00b0-5190-ae8b-8cf97c650ff1.html			
New Mexico	375	74	05/18/2022
Article: https://www.ncronline.org/news/accountability/1215m-settlement-new-mexico-clergy-sex-abuse-scandal			
Pennsylvania	1,000+	300+	08/14/2018
Report: https://www.attorneygeneral.gov/report/			
Pages: 887			
AG Video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6cANsy_QG8w			

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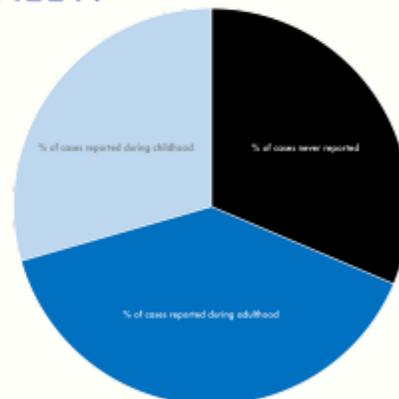
What's the cost of child sex abuse?

THE AVERAGE LIFETIME COST OF CHILD MALTREATMENT IS **\$830,928.00 PER VICTIM**

Child maltreatment includes: physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse (psychologic abuse), and neglect. **The toxic stress and trauma associated with childhood sexual abuse (CSA) are even higher for CSA victims than those who experience other forms of child maltreatment.***

ESTIMATES PLACE THE ECONOMIC BURDEN OF ABUSE AT **\$2 TRILLION ANNUALLY.**

This number is based on the estimated incidence of *investigated* annual cases and is likely significantly higher when taking into consideration the high incidence of unreported cases. As the black section of the pie chart graphic shows, nearly 1/3 of cases are never reported.



HOW TO SOLVE THE PROBLEM

Cure the injustice of unfair SOLs to: (1) identify hidden child predators, (2) shift the cost of abuse from the victims and the taxpayers to those that caused it, and (3) educate the public and prevent future abuse.

*M. Merricka, et. al, Unpacking the impact of adverse childhood experiences on adult mental health, *Child Abuse Negl.* (2017); Angelakis I, Gillespie EL, Panagioti M, Childhood maltreatment and adult suicidality: a comprehensive systematic review with meta-analysis *Psychological Medicine* 1-22 (2019); Gail Hornot, *Childhood Trauma Exposure & Toxic Stress: What the PNP Needs to Know*, *J Pediatric Healthcare* (2015); Perryman Group, *Suffer the Little Children: An Assessment of the Economic Cost of Child Maltreatment* (2014)



The Sean P. McIlmail Statute of
Limitations Research Institute
at CHILDUSA



WHAT IS SEX TRAFFICKING?

Sex trafficking is “the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, obtaining, patronizing, or soliciting of a person for the purpose of a commercial sex act...” 22 U.S.C. § 7102(12).

When a defendant “benefits, financially or by receiving anything of value, from participation in a venture which has engaged in” one of the sex trafficking crimes, they are liable for sex trafficking. 18 U.S.C. § 1591 (a)(2).

SEVERE SEX TRAFFICKING:

Severe sex trafficking is “[s]ex trafficking in which a commercial sex act is **INDUCED BY FORCE, FRAUD, OR COERCION**, or in which the person induced to perform such an act has not attained 18 years of age.” 22 U.S.C. § 7102(11)(a) (emphasis added).

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THE ELEMENTS OF SEVERE SEX TRAFFICKING

AN ACT, VIA MEANS, FOR THE PURPOSE OF SEXUAL EXPLOITATION. ¹²

MEANS

Force, fraud, or coercion.

This is NOT an element of trafficking for minors; only an act and purpose are necessary. ¹³

ACT

Inducement, recruitment, harboring, transportation, providing, obtaining.

An adult victim's consent is irrelevant to whether trafficking occurred. ¹⁵

PURPOSE

Commercial sex.

Payment is irrelevant to whether trafficking occurred. ¹⁵

Important Notes:

- Movement is NOT an element of sex trafficking ¹⁴
- An analysis of sex trafficking requires considering the totality of the circumstances for each victim.
- Trafficking operations can vary from one trafficker to a global enterprise with recruiters, business managers, and money managers.

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WHAT IS DELAYED DISCLOSURE?

The phenomenon common to survivors of child sex abuse where individuals wait for years, often decades, before disclosing to others that they have been victims of abuse.

For victims of child sex abuse, it is remarkable to disclose abuse at all, regardless of their age. Data from the Department of Justice suggests that 86% of child sexual abuse goes unreported altogether.[1] However, when victims of child sex abuse do report, a high percentage of them delay disclosure well into adulthood.[2]

The delay in disclosing child sex abuse happens for a variety of complex and overlapping reasons. Child victims face many barriers that prevent disclosure. Among other barriers, children often lack the knowledge needed to recognize sexual abuse, lack the ability to articulate that they've been abused, don't have an adult they can disclose their abuse to, don't have opportunities to disclose abuse, and aren't believed when they try to disclose. Trauma that results from the abuse, power differentials between the child victim and adult perpetrator, and institutional power dynamics all impact the delay.

Even in the rare instances when child victims do disclose abuse, disclosures are often ineffective. In other words, most disclosures fail to reach individuals who can report the situation and stop the predator from continued abuse. Research shows that, when child victims do disclose, a large percentage of the disclosures are to peers instead of parents or authority figures.[3] Very few disclosures, typically between only 6% and 15%, are made to legal authorities.[4] As a result, child sexual abuse is largely hidden from the adult society, especially from professionals in the legal system.[5]

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Why authorities identify a non-representative percentage of child sexual abuse cases.

ROADBLOCKS TO REPORTING

Child victims of sexual abuse

Disclose during childhood (25-53%)

Disclose to legal authorities (6-16%)

These factors all impact what the disclosure of child sex abuse looks like. Some research depicts disclosure as a process that involves "telling through direct and indirect hints and signs, decisions to tell, re-decisions and delaying, or withholding until adulthood, and the dependency on trusted confidants who ask and listen for final disclosure to occur." [6] Rather than occurring in a single moment, the process of disclosure can take decades to come to fruition.

WHAT DOES THE DATA TELL US?

The majority of child sex abuse victims who disclose their abuse delay disclosure until adulthood

- **82.9% did not report any of the rapes they experienced during childhood.** (Hanson et al. 1999) [1]
- **60%-70% of adults do not recall ever disclosing their abuse as children.** (London et al. 2005) [1]
- **55-69% of adults indicated that they never told anyone about the sexual abuse during childhood.** (London et al. 2008) [1]
- **Disclosure rates are between 31% and 41% for disclosure during childhood and between 58 and 72% for lifetime disclosure** (Priebe and Svedin 2008) [4]

A large portion of abuse victims never disclose abuse at all

- **About 1 survivor out of 5 had never disclosed the abuse** (Hébert et al. 2009) [10]
- **28% stated that they had never told anyone about this sexual assault** (Smith et al. 2000) [3]
- **62% remained silent about their abused experience.** (Tang 2002) [3]
- **There is clear support for the proposition that a large proportion of abuse victims never disclose** (Lyon 2009) [11]

The nature of child sex abuse makes disclosure a complex, often life-long, process

- **Research indicates that lengthy delays in disclosure and even nondisclosure are common** (Paine and Hansen 2002) [11]
- **Disclosure is almost always an ongoing process** (Browne 1991) [12]

Research indicates that the following factors may impact the ability or willingness of victims to disclose abuse

- **Age** - Younger children are at a higher risk for longer delays and less disclosure overall [13]
- **Gender** - Males are more reluctant to disclose abuse and take longer to make full disclosures [14]
- **Intellectual Ability** - Children with intellectual/communication deficits face increased challenges [15]
- **Fear, Shame, Embarrassment** - Are inhibitors that often outweigh the desire to disclose abuse [16]
- **Cultural Norms and Race** - Membership in noticeable minority groups or collectivist cultures may increase disclosure delays [17]
- **Dysfunction in Family** - The presence of domestic violence, substance abuse, and a lack of familial support in the home all inhibit disclosure [18]
- **Relationship to Perpetrator** - One of the primary barriers related to a child's willingness to disclose [19]
- **Nature of Abuse** - More severe abuse [20], long durations of abuse [21], and higher numbers of perpetrators [22] are related to a lower willingness to disclose