

Dear Senator Brown,

I am writing to ask you to prioritize your consideration for Senate Bill 135. As a Catholic, as a politician, and as a member of Right to Life, I know the sanctity of life--the protection of children--is an issue very near and dear to your heart, and I trust you'll see that Senate Bill 135 becomes a law as swiftly as possible.

This bill must become law because it would represent a legal recognition of a survivor's right to recovery on their terms—a direct defiance to the way of a life a survivor of abuse once knew.

As you may have seen, Emmy-award winner Kara Kenney with WRTV in Indianapolis released a story on February 22, 2021, regarding allegations of sexual misconduct by former Indiana teacher, Nathan Shewell (see link in postscript). Before being fired from North Central High School for making false claims on his job application in an effort to conceal prior allegations of misconduct, Shewell was employed by Silver Creek High School in Sellersburg, Indiana—where similar allegations were made.

In the WRTV interview, Ashley Nation (a.k.a. Victim #1) states that it took her more than a decade to come to terms with what she endured as a result of Shewell's treatment of her whilst his student. I was also a student of Nathan Shewell, and because I had already endured sexual abuse by the time I met him during my eighth-grade school year, much of his grooming and progressive harassment of me from 2010-2012 seemed “normal.” This level of acceptability was further reinforced by the adults entrusted with my—our—well-being. I watched many peers and their parents repeatedly report Nathan Shewell to Silver Creek High School administration, including Assistant Principal of Silver Creek Elementary School, Cathy Ryan. Her daughter was not only in the theater program under Shewell, but Ms. Ryan was also the Assistant Drama Director and personally witnessed much of his misconduct. Nonetheless, despite years of allegations, Shewell was allowed to resign when multiple allegations were made in quick succession.

The schools' decisions to not address these allegations inadvertently normalized the wrongs he wrought, and I am confident that this is a belief shared amongst all of his former students who have spoken out, as well as many who likely remain silent thus far. Ashley Nation and I have spoken, and we both only realized how abusive Shewell's behavior was once we became mothers ourselves in our twenties—well beyond the statute of limitations for sexual offenses in the State of Indiana.

This is why Senate Bill 135 must become law.

As many trauma and abuse survivors will attest, healing is far from a linear process. And as Ashley Nation said in her statement following the WRTV interview (see attached), why should legislation—a piece of paper—decide when any survivor is “ready” to face their abuse? For many of us, it's all we can do to survive the abuses we must endure, and once we've escaped the situation, we must focus on rebuilding our life—reliving the abuses and trauma is not our primary or immediate focus. However, Indiana law currently limits how long we have to process our trauma—experiences from our childhood, an age of innocence and naivete—which is a disgrace. If every person has the inalienable right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, why is it that we have a limited right to justice after our life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness were restricted by a violation of our personal and physical safety due to abuse?

It is only logical that survivors of abuse be granted the time it takes to process their trauma and decide a course of action on their terms. It is a fundamental right of Americans that,

when accused, they are innocent until proven guilty in a criminal court. In a civil court, as would be the case per Senate Bill 135, why should there remain an expiration date on justice for a wronged party? As Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 12:9, "And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me." If we believe these words, that God sustains us with His perfect strength in our weakness, why should any man limit the time allotted for a survivor of such abominable acts to find their strength--the One inside who is greater than any evil in the world? If the courts and People are bound to presume innocence until guilt is proven for that matter, why shouldn't a victim who is ten years past the abuse be granted the same leniency to state their case as a victim who is only a year free from torment? If our state--our nation--is built to be just, why would a statute of limitations exist at all, if not to promote injustice and protect the wrongdoers, rather than empower the wronged?

I am not imploring your support for Senate Bill 135 as a constituent. Rather, I beseech you as your fellow human being. Survivors deserve more than an expiration date for justice.

Thank you,  
Olivia Castetter