

On Wednesday, February 24, 2021, I sent a variation of this letter to all fifty Indiana State Senators. My aim is to demand their attention on a bill that would remove the civil statute of limitations on victims of child sexual abuse receiving justice (i.e., permission to sue their abuser(s)).

This bill is of particular importance to me because of the example set by Ashley Nation, who needed more than a decade to process the abuse she endured and to realize it was, in fact, abuse. Additionally, as a survivor of sexual abuse/assault prior in my minority, I am well-aware of the ways in which the liberty to seek justice (even merely civil justice) against my abusers/attacker would change my life now. For example, if I were able to bring a lawsuit against the individual who raped me, I might be able to afford the counseling I need to process and overcome that trauma. I believe it is wholly unfair that when someone survives abuse, that survivor is then responsible for paying for their recovery, which is only necessary because of someone else's actions. Why should the one seeking to overcome a violation of their humanity be the one to pay for it?

DISCLAIMER: Although I mention being harassed by Nathan Shewell as his student in the letter below, I want to be clear that he is not the man who assaulted me.

Dear Senator,

I am writing to ask you to prioritize your consideration for Senate Bill 135. 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?

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*