

Members of the New York State Senate and members of the New York State Assembly, I am Robert Corliss and I am a member of the Call to Action Upstate New York chapter.. We are part of national Call to Action which consists predominantly of Catholics laypersons who pursue reform and renewal in our church as well as issues of justice and peace in our larger society.

Upstate CTA represents many counties outside of metropolitan New York and also is an affiliate of the statewide Catholic Coalition of Conscience which for several years has strongly supported legislation which would bring meaningful reform to New York's outdated and ineffective statutes of limitations for survivors of childhood sexual assault.

As Catholics and people of faith we view this as a moral issue that we must confront in our churches and in our larger society. In a 2017 poll over 70% of Catholics agreed that addressing sexual abuse issues should be a top priority. More recently, a Quinnipiac poll disclosed that 76% of New Yorkers supported a Child Victims Act.

This year we are gratified and pleased to support Governor Cuomo's proposed legislation in his 2018-19 Executive Budget which creates a New York State Child Victims Act.

We know many bishops have opposed this legislation in the past because they claim it singles out the Catholic Church. We do not agree, nor do we agree that lawsuits will bankrupt many dioceses. The proposed legislation targets abusers, of which those in ministry account for a relatively small number. And those states which have enacted similar laws have not witnessed the financial impact the bishops have feared.

The proposed legislation is comprehensive and would cover cases that have occurred in schools, sports, religious institutions, scouting, youth clubs, etc. Further, research tells us that the greatest number of sex abuse cases occurs where the abuser is a family member or friend.

The legislation offered by Governor Cuomo in the 2018-19 Budget fundamentally reforms both the criminal statute of limitations as well as the civil statute of limitations, and, importantly, creates a one year look-back window permitting those who were abused years ago to finally have their day in court. It is now understood in the mental health field that it usually takes years for victims of childhood abuse to be able to face the realities of their abuse and to publicly report and discuss the circumstances.

Through the years, I have been afforded the privilege to meet and come to know so many of these courageous folks who have come forward to tell their stories. In many cases they bear the scars of this abuse and always will. But they soldier on. I also know of so many more where the abuse has so severely damaged their lives that they are not able to live productively and hide in the shadows. And, there are also those who gave up on living and are no longer with us.

As I said at the outset, we view this as a moral issue which calls us to help repair the lives of those who have been broken by childhood sexual abuse, to publicly identify those abusers who have gone nameless, and to provide notice to all who would abuse children or countenance such abuse that the community of New York will not tolerate such behavior or indifference.

Thank you.