

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

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February 23 , 2021

The Honorable Rhonda Fields
Chair
Colorado Senate HHS Committee

Re: Testimony in support of S.B. 21-073

Dear Senator Fields and Committee members:

I am writing on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) to urge you to vote in favor of passing S.B. 21-073. FFRF is a national nonprofit organization with more than 34,000 members across the country, including more than 1,000 members and a state chapter in Colorado. FFRF protects the constitutional separation between state and church, and educates about nontheism.

S.B. 21-073 expands justice by removing multiple barriers that prevent sexual abuse survivors in Colorado from pursuing relief through the courts. While a total repeal of criminal and civil statute of limitations in these cases would be preferable, repealing the civil statute of limitations prospectively is unambiguously positive. The bill's other changes similarly remove provisions that serve no purpose other than to make healing more difficult for survivors. FFRF strongly urges the Committee to approve S.B. 21-073.

The abuse, assault, or rape of children has lasting physical, emotional, and mental effects. The victims are changed forever and their development as an individual, as a person, is altered in ways non-victims may never truly understand. When children are robbed of their innocence in this brutal manner, we should not be surprised that it takes years, or even decades, for these victims to face what has happened to them, let alone to take the difficult steps of seeking redress and justice. Our laws should give access to justice to these survivors when they are ready, not shut the door on them because they took what some might consider to be "too long" to deal with the earth-shattering consequences of their abuse.

This is even more important in cases, like these, where the criminals actively cover up their crimes. In recent years, many states have investigated child sexual abuse

perpetuated by clergy employed by various Catholic dioceses and other churches, and have found the problem's scope to be massive.¹ These investigations have revealed structural protections for abusers baked into many church practices, which helps to explain why churches attract predators. This problem is not limited to the Catholic Church, as demonstrated by FFRF's tireless recording of clergy criminal acts in a regular column titled "Black Collar Crime" in Freethought Today, FFRF's newspaper.²

Considering the severe psychological trauma that can result from childhood sexual assault and the extreme, unquestionable power that churches hold over many communities, it is unsurprising that many survivors do not pursue legal action until long after they reach adulthood. This legislation is desperately needed.

Churches have vocally and predictably objected to similar attempts to hold abusers accountable, but their objections are callous and unfounded. This bill is not a free ticket to target churches for windfalls. Survivors still have the burden of proof, and still must find and submit evidence. The longer they wait, the more difficult that becomes. S.B. 21-073 simply gives them the chance to try.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of this bill, and for your commitment to helping to protect your most vulnerable constituents and to hold abusers accountable. If I can provide any further information that would be helpful, or can answer any questions on the issues I've raised, please feel free to contact me at ryan@ffrf.org.

Sincerely,



Ryan D. Jayne
Staff Attorney

¹ See, e.g., Samantha Cooney, "It's Basically Happening Everywhere." *Survivors Say More States Should Investigate Church Abuse Like Pennsylvania*, TIME (Aug. 16, 2018).

² Back issues of Freethought Today and Black Collar Crime are available at FFRF.org.