

Chair Williamson, Vice-Chairs Gorsek and Sprenger and Members of the House Judiciary Committee-

I'm a resident of Oregon and a supporter of sexual assault survivors and I support passing HB 3293. When I was sexually assaulted as a Sophomore in college in 2001 at the age of 19, I wanted to report the encounter and was horrified that my five roommates said it had happened to each of them and my reporting efforts wouldn't be worth it. While they showed empathy and concern, they seemed to suggest this was a rite of passage, as all the women they knew had also encountered a similar scenario of acquaintance rape.

Against their well-meaning advice, I did report it to my workplace where I was a college intern to see what my legal options were and they suggested an employer-provided counselor. I remember feeling shamed during the conversation with the counselor and discouraged to take legal action against the perpetrator. The counselor knew I was raised in a conservative home and was enrolled as a student at a Christian liberal arts college and had only been with one intimate partner, who was also a college intern in the same program, but with whom I had recently ended the relationship. She indicated that my parents would be ashamed of me for not saving myself sexually for marriage and I shouldn't tell them, or anyone about the attack. This was persuasive as I already felt remorse for not waiting to engage in intercourse until marriage with the long-term boyfriend I thought I would marry and for whom I had relocated cross-country months before.

After the attack, I began having anxiety issues and eventually was prescribed medication for managing that. Even on medication, some days were difficult. I had a dream job performing as various Disney characters yet couldn't get out of bed some days. The assault impacted my life in a significant way as my missing work impacted shows at Cinderella's Castle, and eventually they chose to replace me due to the negative impact on the Magic Kingdom park operations. Although I knew I needed help, after that initial attempt at mental health counseling, I avoided facing the sexual assault and seeking treatment until six years later when I was referred by a doctor who had prescribed medication to treat anxiety. In 2007--six years after the sexual assault--I saw a counselor who used Eye-Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) Therapy, designed to alleviate the distress associated with traumatic memories. In our sessions, I was finally able to analyze the situation and realized that there was nothing I could have done to avoid that attack, and that my survival instinct probably kept me from more harm during the incident. After the treatment, I continued to process the situation and eventually was able to go off of the anxiety medication. The whole process took many years. Had I been just a year younger--a minor--I would still be able to hold my abuser accountable. Because I was over 18 years old at the time this happened, statute of limitations prevented me from taking any actions toward the perpetrator, or the workplace that wanted to cover it up.

I'm excited this bill would extend the statute of limitations from two years to seven years (from the discovery of any injury connected to the sexual assault). Please pass this bill that provides time for sexual assault survivors to process their encounter and heal so they're in the correct frame of mind to seek justice for the violence committed against them.

Thank you Chair Williamson, Vice-Chairs Gorsek and Sprenger and Members of the House Judiciary Committee.

Respectfully,
-Emma Burke