



SISTER KERI BURNOR of North Brookfield, left, and Ellen Skroski of Whately applaud one of the speakers yesterday during a rally at the State House in support of reform for the sexual abuse laws in Massachusetts.

Advocates rally to end sex abuse 'artificial timelines'

BOSTON In January 2002, news broke of a clergy sex abuse scandal within the Boston Archdiocese.

Four years later, state legislators and advocates have renewed the push to end the statute of limitations for sex crimes, calling for reform by the end of the year at a State House rally yesterday.

More than 100 people gathered at the Grand Staircase—some sexually abused as children—in support of legislation that would end the criminal and civil statute of limitations.

Current law sets deadlines for sex abuse crimes to be prosecuted. In criminal cases, victims must come forward within six to 15 years of the crime, depending on its severity, and within three years of the crime or recognition of the crime to file a civil suit.

Rep. Ron Mariano, a Quincy Democrat and one of the lead sponsors of the new legislation, called the limits "artificial timelines."

"It takes a long time for people to come to grips with [abuse]," said Mariano, whose bill has 54 co-sponsors in the House and Senate.

Of 39 clergy sex abuse vic-

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REP. RON MARIANO

tims Boston lawyer Carmen Durso represented, he said the average age of a victim was 12.3 years, while the average age for telling someone about the abuse was 44.7 years.

Members of the mental health community explained that shame, along with depression and dissociation, is one of the main reasons victims don't prosecute right away.

"Victims, almost without exception, blame themselves for what happened to them," said psychologist Ann Hagan Webb. "For children, it is the only way they can make sense of something so horrible, thinking 'I must have deserved it.'"

For Mike Kennedy, who was abused at ages 7 1/2 and 10 1/2 in the 1950s, the decision to end the statute of limitations was simple.

"You either support children or your support pedophiles," Kennedy said.

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