

**From:** [REDACTED]  
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**Subject:** FW: guidance

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This is Mike Polenberg who is the Director of Safe Horizons. Safe Horizons runs all the victim organizations around New York City and the surrounding boroughs.

I would like to give him an answer but it is up to you.

He has been very helpful to the office in the past.

[REDACTED]

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**From:** Polenberg, Michael <michael.polenberg@SafeHorizon.org>

**Sent:** Thursday, September 5, 2019 5:25 PM

**To:** [REDACTED]

**Cc:** Meagher, James <james.meagher@SafeHorizon.org>

**Subject:** guidance

[REDACTED] [REDACTED]

With the passage of the Child Victims Act in NYS last January, there seems to be some (renewed) interest in considering statute of limitation reform on the federal level for survivors of childhood sexual abuse. Since I gather SOL reform at the federal level would only apply to federal crimes (and if I'm mistaken, please correct me,) and since I believe civil claims are brought in state – not federal – courts, I wonder if you can let us know what the SOL currently is for federal sex crimes against children.

For a frame of reference, I'm pasting an op-ed that ran in the NY Daily News last week that calls for a "change in federal laws to enable victims, regardless of the state they live in, to have the opportunity to face their abuser in court..."

Also, introducing you both to our Policy Director Jimmy Meagher (cc-d here.) Jimmy has been with Safe Horizon for many years in a variety of roles, and moved into the Policy Director position earlier this summer.

Thank you both so much!

Michael

# We need a federal Child Victims Act

In the wake of high-profile cases involving Jeffrey Epstein and Larry Nassar, child sexual abuse has become a bigger part of the national dialogue. The common thread that runs through both of cases is the multiple institutions that failed to address very visible warning signs for protecting young girls at risk.

In the Epstein case, a lenient federal non-prosecution agreement in 2008 resulted in Epstein serving only 13 months in jail, during which he was allowed out on a daily basis for work release. Police had called for more serious changes involving sexual abuse of underage girls, but the deal resulted in those charges being wiped clean.

In a recent [congressional report](#) focused on the Nassar case, investigators found that multiple institutions failed to take proper action to stop sexual abuse by Nassar. These included USA Gymnastics, the U.S. Olympic Committee, Michigan State University and even the FBI. They all failed to protect victims and enabled their abuse through institutional inaction.

According to research from the [Crimes Against Children Research Center](#), an estimated one in five girls and one in 20 boys is a victim of child sexual abuse. A [Centers for Disease Control study](#) found that this and other traumatic childhood experiences can have serious implications for long-term health, leading to greater risk of suicide, substance abuse and physical ailments such as heart disease.

When the Commission to Eliminate Child Abuse and Neglect Fatalities, on which I served, released its [report](#) in 2016, we determined that no single agency can fully address the circumstances that impact troubled families and children facing abuse. We called for a multidisciplinary approach that includes the involvement of health care and public health agencies, educators, law enforcement, judiciary and more in order to assure the safety of children.

One of the examples we found of a multidisciplinary approach was Child Advocacy Centers, which were introduced in the 1980s. By placing various institutions of law enforcement, child protective services, mental health, medical health and victim advocacy under one roof, their aim is to reduce the trauma experienced by young victims in telling their story to multiple agencies. There are currently more than 1,000 Child Advocacy Centers across the U.S. serving more than 300,000 children.

The Commission has also called for greater access to prevention and earlier intervention services and supports, meaning doing much more to identify children at risk.

Another key component in the healing process for victims is closure and redress. Here, New York State shows the way forward.

Just this past January, the state passed the [Child Victims Act](#), which greatly extends the statutes of limitations for a number of sex crimes, letting victims sue those who abused them. Previously, victims had to file civil suits by their 23rd birthday. Because so many children of abuse fail to come forward initially, the Child Victims Act enables victims to file civil suits until age 55. And we are currently in the midst of a one-year window in which victims can bring lawsuits for molestation predating passage of the law.

Three more states have proposed similar legislation.

Finding justice is one important step for victims of sexual abuse. Ensuring our institutions are prepared to protect children is equally important. As world class gymnast Simone Biles noted in a recent interview when asked about the accountability of USA Gymnastics, "It's hard coming here for an organization having had them fail us so many times. And we had one goal and we've done everything that they've asked us for, and even when we didn't want to, and they couldn't do one damn job. You had one job. You literally had one job and you couldn't protect us."

It's time to change our federal laws to enable victims, regardless of the state they live in, to have the opportunity to face their abuser in court and make it harder for those who target children to get away with their crimes with impunity. We owe it to our children to better ensure their safety from predators like Jeffrey Epstein and Larry Nassar.

*Covington is director of the Within Our Reach office at the Alliance for Strong Families and Communities.*

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