

Testimony of Olivia Welch In Support of HB 3293

Chair Prozanski and Members of the Committee:

My name is Olivia Welch. I live in Washington County, Senate District 13. I am here today to talk about how my sexual assaults have impacted my life, and why I support HB 3293.

When I was 4 my Grandfather molested me in bed. For 17 years, I could not face what happened to me; so, I buried it. And then, in my freshman year of college I was raped by a stranger a week before classes started. As a result of this incident, my memories of childhood molestation came flooding back, and my world caved in as I was left to deal not only with the emotional and physical wreckage of the sexual assault, but the pain of remembering everything that came before.

My experience being sexually assaulted as an adult affected my life in ways I couldn't ever have imagined. After the rape, I had no intention of telling anyone what happened, but a bystander had called the police and they showed up at my door, so I made a report and had a rape kit. But when law enforcement told me I could be in trouble for using my pepper spray to defend myself, I became terrified of proceeding any further down that road and withdrew completely. Needless to say, talking about it was nearly impossible, even with family or therapist. It was extremely hard to even begin to process what had happened to me, what that meant, and how I was going to accept it as part of my life. It was so extremely painful to even think of the assault let alone work through it. I began to disassociate. One time I called my mom in the middle of the night terrified, because I didn't know how I got to my dorm room. I was so scared, I didn't know what was happening to me. Now, years later, I've come to understand that this dissociation happens when I'm triggered – I have no idea why, it's just my brain reacting in the best way it can to keep me safe. But back then, I just felt like I was going crazy.

Now, imagine having to live not knowing what will trigger you to disassociate or when it could happen. Imagine not knowing when a paralyzing flashback will suddenly grip you and leave you shaking and gasping for air. Imagine having to uproot your entire life and transfer out of college in the middle of your junior year because everywhere you look you see reminders of what happened, and it makes you physically sick.

I lived in that reality and with that fear – tormented by multiple symptoms of PTSD – for the next 6 and a half years of my life. It took me that long to finally feel ready to face what had happened to me at school. I can't explain why it took so long. What I can tell you is that anytime before that 6 and a half years, I literally could not think about it, much less talk about it. And if I couldn't even talk about it, how could I even consider legal action? How was I going to come forward again and face my rapist in court? Seek justice? Had my voice heard?

Time, and a lot of it, is what it took for me to be able to comprehend what happened, and how it affected me. When I could understand what happened, I could begin to accept the things that I went through. I could begin to mend and heal. I could begin to live my life. I do wish I could face my perpetrator in court and have the closure of a jury of my peers

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acknowledging that what happened to me was real, and that it was wrong. I know that will never happen. But I hope that by passing of HB 3293 other women and men know they will have the time to process their trauma before having to stand and face their perpetrator too soon, that they will have the opportunity for healing before facing the difficult task of coming forward and telling their story.

Thank you.