

Joint Senate-Assembly Hearing

On

2018-2019 Executive Budget

Public Protection Section

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Testimony submitted

By

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Call To Action Metro New York

With testimony included

From

Connie Altamirano

Victim/Survivor

Thank you for the opportunity to speak about the Child Victims Act which is included in the public safety section of Governor Cuomo's 2018-2019 executive budget.

My name is **Nancy Lorence** and I am speaking today as a Catholic. I am on the board of Call To Action Metro New York, and I am speaking on their behalf. Call To Action Metro NY is part of a national Catholic social justice organization.

We started working on the issue of sexual abuse of children by forming the Catholic Coalition of Conscience to address the sexual abuse crisis within our own church in the wake of the Boston scandal.

We have since recognized that this is a moral issue within the society as a whole, and that adults prey on vulnerable children because they can get away with it....by using their power as adults, often adults with some authority, such as a babysitter, a family friend, a relative, a teacher, a coach, a minister, priest or rabbi, or a janitor of a school.

Predators use their power over children to lure them, trick them, and force them into inappropriate sexual relationships that are very destructive to their child victims. Then they threaten them if they disclose the secret.

We know that hidden predators have many more than one victim... that pedophiles go from one child to another as their victims age out of the preferred age category of the abuser.

It is such a prevalent public safety issue for children and adolescents – one in four girls and one in six boys will be sexually abused by age 18 - that it makes me concerned for my grandchildren.

We've seen from the #MeToo movement and the recent Dr. Larry Nassar case, from Penn State, from the Catholic Church and from prep schools here in New York state that once one victim has the courage to come forward, others will follow. Victims free themselves from their guilt and shame by finally handing it back to their abuser when they go public. By doing so, they also alert the public to keep children away from that abuser.

Fellow New Yorkers and legislators: Time's Up! New York can no longer be among the worst states in the country for protecting predators! Predators know they can easily run out the short statutes of limitation in New York. We need the Child Victims Act to become law. The Child Victims Act would help bring predators in New York out of hiding.....predators that hide behind our unrealistic and outdated statutes of limitation for sexual abuse of children. In California, a similar bill that lifted the statutes of limitation with a look-back window identified over 300 abusers of children. The governor's program bill will take us in the right direction to do the same.

The Catholic Church's Independent Reconciliation and Compensation Programs is a step in the right direction, but has serious limitations in that it has only covered those victims abused by diocesan priests, not by other church or school personnel, nor priests or brothers from religious orders such as Dominicans, Franciscans, or Jesuits. Interestingly, though, this program did provide an opportunity for

justice for old cases for which the legal Statutes of Limitation had expired. The Child Victims Act MUST do the same. Lifting the statutes of limitation for a specified amount of time of one to three years in five other states has brought to light hundreds of previously hidden predators and prevented further abuse.

As Catholics we ask the Catholic Conference of Bishops, and also the Boy Scouts and Agudeth Israel, to stand aside, to stop lobbying against this bill. It is a bill that offers better protection for our children and grandchildren. Our children's future is at stake; it is their future that the hidden predators are ruining. It is our responsibility as a society to protect the most vulnerable. Own up to your responsibility. You are standing on the side of predators. You are standing against protecting New York's CHILDREN! You are standing on the wrong side of justice for all victims of sexual childhood abuse.

Governor Cuomo, thank you for a program bill that stands on the right side of justice and for the protection of New York's children. We ask every New York Senator – Democrat and Republican - to join the movement to expose predators and prevent them from continuing to secretly abuse children sexually by hiding behind New York State's outdated Statutes of Limitation laws. We ask that you do this now; we have waited long enough.

As part of my testimony, I would like to introduce Connie Altamirano, a victim/survivor that has found her voice by working with us on this issue:

Hi, my name is **Connie Altamirano**, and I was born in Brooklyn NY, where I was sexually abused and raped as a toddler by my step-grandfather. I still live in the same place where the sexual abuse and rape took place until I was around 2nd grade. The mental abuse and verbal abuse did not stop until my early twenties.

The man's name was Vicente Sanchez; he was an alcoholic and a wife beater. When he finished assaulting me, he would say he would kill me and my mother if I said something. He had a record of domestic violence at Precinct 104 on Catalpa Ave. in Ridgewood, Queens. It's the same precinct my mother called for help when she found out about my abuse.

That day something horrific happened. After I was raped, I sat on a chair frozen with a dollar in my hand that he gave me. My grandmother came home and asked: "Why are you sitting there looking into space?" and "Did you steal that dollar?" She went and got a belt and hit me over and over again. Then I blurted out what her husband did to me and that he said I earned it. My grandmother yelled at me and called me a liar and accused me of trying to steal her husband. I cried while waiting for my mother to pick me up after work. My mother came and my grandmother told her: Maria, take your daughter; she's a trouble maker. My mom asked me what happened and I told her what my step-grandfather was doing to me.

Then my mother spoke with her relatives and told them what was happening, and I was afraid for my life and my mother's. I felt I had opened my mouth when I shouldn't have. Then my mother called the police and relatives came over. My grandmother found out my mother had called the police and she

came running down and got on her knees to beg my mother and me to stay silent. My grandmother forced her two youngest children to beg for their fathers' life in front of me and my mother. The police arrived and interviewed my mother and relatives. I was frozen, scared, and crying, waiting to get killed by my rapist. The police concluded the interviews and left. I never saw them again. Later a social worker came who spoke with my mother and looked at me and left. I never saw her again. And I was only 8 or 9 years old.

As a child I struggled in school year after year not understanding what happened to me and why this was happening to me. I was relieved when I was in school, but I was scared to be released to go home to get raped again. I suffered from migraines flashbacks, PTSD, panic attacks, nightmares, and was afraid of everyone. I cried in school and was never able to concentrate and learn in school. I was suicidal and attempted to kill myself twice in elementary school. I was angry at everyone who failed me and I didn't understand why my life didn't matter to anyone.

I remember on holidays I was locked up or placed in a room for my safety while the rapist enjoyed the family party. I was told: Stay here so he doesn't see you. I lived in the rapist's prison half of my life, and now, as an adult survivor, I live imprisoned by the effects I suffer of sexual abuse as a child. I went through life looking for a cure and hoping someone or something could fix me. I didn't find one. Time and time again I was feeling like a failure. I finally made it to the 9th grade, and couldn't handle the boys flirting with me, and I feared I would get raped or killed, so I dropped out of school for my safety. I stayed in my room where no one could see me and I couldn't see anyone. I lived and still live in fear of being raped and killed.

I have many medical issues related to this traumatic abuse. This monster lives free with no guilt or remorse. I lived decades of no self-worth, voiceless, in pain, and struggling to survive just one more day. Then I would exhale the next day out of relief that I had made it to the next day. The quality of life that survivors have is affected by feeling that our lives don't matter and that we don't count...that we are not part of society and the attitude that we should just get over it! For a long time, I felt like a failure because I didn't fight my rapist. I disengaged. I floated away into my own world. I fight a battle to survive every day. I carry my sexual assault baggage with me every day.

Every survivor is unique. I have triggers every day and take extra precautions and measures to accomplish any one thing. That doesn't make me weak or uneducated. Every victim/survivor is unique and needs to find their way to validate their life. I'm still navigating my survivor identity, and sometimes have to remind myself I'm a survivor, no longer a victim. Why? Because the flashbacks, triggers, and nightmares bring me back to when I was a child getting raped and waiting to get killed.

I ask everyone in this room to think about the worst thing that's ever happened to you. How much time do you give it thought in your day? How much does it play out in your day-to-day living? I thank Senator Young for not only giving me the opportunity to speak, but for validating my life here today. Allowing me to speak indicates that my life does matter and my voice counts too. The importance of this bill passing is to give us an opportunity to have justice. For me, it's justice for the girl inside who still cries. But it is also to protect our children in the state of NY. Many victims of child sexual abuse have committed

suicide. We must not forget them. They are our brother and sisters. I'm among the 93% percent of victims of child sexual abuse whose perpetrator is in the family or a friend of the family. My case fell through the cracks, and I'm here so it does happen to another little girl or boy. I ask you to pass the Child Victims Act, not next year, but this year. Not just for me, but for all the kids of the state of New York. Again thank you from the bottom of my heart.