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New two-year window for survivors of childhood sexual abuse to file civil lawsuits opening in Arkansas as the first window closes

Arkansas State Sen. David Wallace praises lawmakers for overwhelming bi-partisan support for victims

LITTLE ROCK, ARKANSAS (February 6, 2024) – Arkansas State Senator David Wallace (R-19th Dist.) today announced a new legal opportunity for survivors of childhood sexual abuse in Arkansas to seek civil justice and accountability against their perpetrators – a second two-year revival window beginning February 1, 2024 during which claims can be brought. The Justice for Vulnerable Victims of Sexual Abuse Act, sponsored by Sen. Wallace and State Representative Jimmy Gazaway (R- 57th Dist.), and first signed into law in 2021, provides a “lookback window” in recognition of the fact that the psychological damage done by childhood sexual abuse often makes it difficult for victims to come forward about their abuse until well into adulthood. In the United States, more than half of child sexual abuse victims first report their abuse after age 50.

The original version of the law passed three years ago with near unanimous bi-partisan support, a credit to Arkansas lawmakers and an opportunity for healing and accountability for survivors. The new window for the filing of claims began February 1, 2024 and will close in two years on January 31, 2026.

This comes on the heels of the first window closing, which ran from January 28, 2022 and ended January 31, 2024, by the bi-partisan passage of Arkansas bill #16-118-118. The current window, made possible by an amendment to the original bill, makes civil justice possible for all survivors of childhood sexual abuse, regardless of what year that abuse took place or how old the survivor is now, for this limited two year period

During the 2022-2024 lookback window, more than 20 civil legal claims were filed on behalf of well over 100 survivors of childhood sexual abuse in Arkansas.

Recent studies reflect that up to 1 in 4 girls and 1 in 14 boys experiences childhood sexual abuse at some point in the United States. Further, according to a study by safehome.org and reported in the USA Today, the state of Arkansas has the highest rate of reported sexual child abuse in the country.

“In the many years I have served in the Arkansas legislature, sponsoring these laws that created a path to justice for victims of childhood sexual abuse have been the most special pieces of legislation to me personally. I am humbled by the constituents who have shared their stories with me, and I am honored to help them confront their perpetrators and seek accountability. I hear from someone new almost every week who has been directly impacted by this type of personal trauma, and each of their lives matters to me,” said Arkansas State Senator David Wallace, who sponsored the Justice for Vulnerable Victims of Sexual Abuse Act. “In a very divided world, it has been reassuring to see that lawmakers on both sides of the aisle came together to do the right thing here for the people of Arkansas and to send a clear message that childhood sexual abuse will not be tolerated. We stand with survivors in every community and against the perpetrators of these terrible crimes.”

“Today we applaud the bipartisan efforts of Arkansas legislators for passing and then amending the Justice for Vulnerable Victims of Sexual Abuse Act, extending the statute of limitations beyond the age of 55 as of February 1, 2024. This vital step ensures justice for all survivors and victims. To those who have endured abuse, your voices matter, and through these collective efforts, there is hope and healing available. Thank you for your resilience. The average age that a person reports the abuse they suffered as a child is about 52 years. Our society is only beginning to understand the science and psychology behind delayed disclosure as it influences our perception of child sex abuse survivor. If you are a survivor, please know that there is hope and healing in coming forward. Know that you are not alone, and that the laws of Arkansas now stand behind you, no matter your age. Seven years ago this month, I began my own journey of healing from the abuse that I and many others here today endured and kept quiet for far too long. The journey has not been an easy one, but it has allowed the 10-year-old version of myself to finally know that in Arkansas we now matter,” said William Stevens, who experienced sexual abuse as a child and is a plaintiff in a civil claim filed in the last two years because of the law.

“On behalf of survivors of childhood sexual abuse in Arkansas, we are grateful for leaders in our community who have pushed this law into action. Circumstances that evoked this law happened to us because many adults in our lives failed us when we were children. We needed and deserved time to become adults ourselves to face those authority figures. Through opportunities this law provides we find our voice, offer protection to potential future victims, seek accountability for wrongdoing, and take further steps in healing. We thank our leaders for their decision to pass this law and ask them to continue to be tenacious about this issue. We are grateful for their support. No one should turn their heads from childhood sexual abuse, but as a community we should all empower victims to be strong and courageous when speaking up,” said Kailen Daniel, who experienced sexual abuse as a child and is a plaintiff in a civil claim filed in the last two years because of the law.

To learn more about The Justice for Vulnerable Victims of Sexual Abuse Act please contact Arkansas State Senator David Wallace (R- 19th Dist.) at david.wallace@senate.ar.gov, (870) 919-8046.