

November 30th, 2020

Dear Judiciary and Public Safety Committee Members,

My name is Kristen Burgess. I am the mother of a sexual abuse survivor, the daughter of a sexual abuse survivor, and I am the survivor of the most difficult betrayal a wife can experience; my husband chose to sexually harm our teenage daughter.

The last few years of my life have been very difficult, and they will remain difficult for the foreseeable future.

That difficulty, however, is likely not for reasons you would expect.

My daughter made a decision that not many survivors speak openly about (though our Children's Advocacy Center tells us that at least half of survivors have similar feelings). She wanted to have the chance to speak with her dad, my husband, about what happened. And she wanted the chance to explore healing and rebuilding that relationship on some level.

In time, I also came to the place where I chose to support her wishes; I also decided to explore healing my marriage.

Unfortunately, our county Prosecuting Attorney, on behalf of the "People of Michigan," chose to deny our family healing and to silence my now-adult daughter's voice.

Somehow she believed that "justice" was served by silencing the survivor and the survivor's mother, and by asking judges for the harshest consequences possible - consequences which both my daughter and myself vehemently disagreed with. This may have served her career but the collateral damage to us was (and remains to this day) unacceptable.

The state has its "justice" and we have a broken family and silenced - not to mention the difficulty of trying to rebuild in spite of the State's terrible choice to force our family into a long, expensive prison sentence and all of the trauma and financial ruin it brings.

That brings me to the registry and HB5679.

I do not need to tell you that **the sex offender registry is utterly ineffective and almost certainly dangerous.**

You know that it is. You've heard the expert testimony, you've seen the research, reports, statistics, and numbers.

You know that Michigan's registry (and the federal registry guidelines) have no basis in evidence that the registry mitigates harm.

You know that keeping the registry alive is a political move and nothing more.

But for us, the registry is far worse than ineffective political pandering.

For us, the registry is a continuation of the violation of healing the State sentenced our family to. The registry will continue to burden us and interrupt our healing for *decades* to come. Our family - **our daughter as a survivor, our other children - they will pay the price of having a loved one on the**

registry. Their inheritance will be stolen by registry fees, just as the courts and the Michigan Department of Corrections **steal their inheritance** now. They will face humiliation, and possible vigilante retaliation, just because their father made terrible choices years ago...

...and someone decided that perpetual punishment, humiliation, and public branding was a good political move.

My children will suffer. My grandchildren will suffer.

Additionally, **the registry is dangerous to every child at risk of sexual abuse.**

The registry doesn't work to protect children - it only works to get politicians elected (or get them browie points and "atta boys" in office). **The registry shifts conversations away from strategies that truly prevent sexual abuse.**

The registry shuts down conversations about the primary prevention of child sexual abuse.

If we had heard PSA's about risk factors for child sexual abuse...

...if my husband had seen PSA's on where male survivors of child sexual abuse could get help (such as 1in6.org)...

...if he had known there are confidential helplines for people struggling with a downward spiral that could lead to repeating sexual harm (such as StopItNow.org's helpline)...

...my daughter might have been spared.

How much does the registry cost?

How much will it cost to bifurcate the Michigan registry and burden the MSP with further complex red tape?

How much will ongoing litigation cost as people fight against the monstrous and life-crushing perpetual punishment you have on the floor before you?

Wouldn't it make far more sense to say, and to say boldly, "**The emperor has no clothes. The registry is ineffective and dangerous. We are going to fund primary prevention efforts, Children's Advocacy Centers, and other measures that actually stop (and help heal) child sexual abuse.**"

The cost of a decision for the ineffective registry is exorbitant – in both dollars and innocent souls.

Will you be brave enough to be the legislator who helps **stop child sexual abuse**?

Or will you sacrifice our precious children on the alter of political popularity?

Give people, families, and children a chance. Vote NO on HB5679.

Sincerely,

Kristen Burgess