



The Awareness Center, Inc.

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SB 575: Civil Actions - Child Sexual Abuse - Statute of Limitations
Maryland Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee, Annapolis, MD
Thursday, March 1, 2007 - 1:00 pm

Pedophilia has no religion. Those who perpetrate sexual offenses come in all shapes, sizes, colors, ages, sexes and religions -- as do the survivors of sex crimes.

We are here today because the current systems in our schools, institutions, organizations, churches, synagogues, mosques and temples do not work to protect our children. Instead our systems appear to be set up to protect the assets of the organizations and institutions, as well as the rights of those who offend; while ignoring the rights of those have been sexually victimized.

My goal today is to provide testimony on behalf the survivors who have contacted The Awareness Center, Inc., many of whom were too afraid to provide their own testimony in fear of retaliation. The Awareness Center is the International Jewish Coalition Against Sexual Abuse/ Assault. Our world headquarters is located in Baltimore, MD.

The history of the Jewish People is one filled with a series of traumatic experiences; including one topic that up until now that has been taboo to discuss: Sexual Victimization (*childhood sexual abuse, sexual assault, clergy sexual abuse, professional sexual misconduct and sexual harassment*). When referring to the Jewish Community I am discussing all movements including: the unaffiliated, Jewish Renewal, Reform, and Conservative, to the Orthodox, 'Charedi' and 'Chasidic' communities.

Contrary to what we might want to assume, sexual violence is not limited to the gentile population: it is also a Jewish issue and one that needs to be addressed. In the United States one out of every three to five women, and one out of every five to seven men have been sexually abused by the time they reach their eighteenth birthday. This includes Jewish communities in the state of Maryland.

One of the major problems in discussing the issue of sexual violence in the Jewish community is that doing so threatens the cultural perception of the wholesomeness of the Jewish family. Many survivors have been warned that speaking out would lead to an increase in anti-Semitism and possibly another holocaust (*see: <http://www.theawarenesscenter.org/Anti-Semitism.pdf>*).

The tradition in handling cases of sex crimes in Jewish communities has been to handle allegations quietly and internally. In most cases no police or hotline reports are made. Instead our rabbis attempt to handle situations on their own. An example of this is the case of **Samuel (Shmuel) Juravel**, who is now sitting in a federal prison, sentenced for 22 years (*see: http://www.theawarenesscenter.org/juravel_samuel.html*).

Sam is the son of a Baltimore rabbi. His father is highly connected and a teacher at a yeshiva (private boys school). The first allegations of Samuel molesting boys occurred 15 years ago. The rabbis did their job in keeping things quiet, law enforcement was never notified, and Samuel was swiftly sent away to another community.

Earlier this year Sam was arrested by the FBI in an Internet sting. He confessed and subsequently sentenced to 22 years in prison. Almost a full year after Samuel Juravel's arrest, the Baltimore Jewish Times finally had the courage to publish his name in the paper. On Friday, February 23, 2007 one of Sam's survivor's was finally able to have his voice be heard (see: <http://jewishtimes.com/3078.stm>).

What is interesting about Sam's case is that for many years allegations have been made against the current principal of the boys' school where Sam's father teaches. **Rabbi Eliezer Eisgrau** has been accused of sexually abusing students as well as one of his own children. It is a case most adults in the orthodox community of Baltimore are aware of (See: http://www.theawarenesscenter.org/eisgrau_eliezer.html).

Those who made allegations against Rabbi Eisgrau were virtually chased out of town. The parents of the children making the allegations were told that their children were no longer welcome in the Jewish school. They were also told that they were no longer welcome to pray in their synagogues and were warned that the child victims and their siblings would not find good marriage partners if they remained in the community. The teenage child of the alleged offender basically ended up on the streets. The alleged offender had the protection of the powerful rabbis of the Baltimore community and those rabbis were willing to go to whatever lengths to protect their friend.

Another case of interest is that of **Rabbi Matis Weinberg** (See: http://www.theawarenesscenter.org/weinberg_matis.html). Allegations of his offending behavior began when he was about sixteen years old and resided with his parents on the campus of Ner Israel Rabbinical College and Yeshiva (a boys' school). Matis is the son of two very powerful individuals in the Baltimore Jewish community: His father, Yaakov Weinberg, was the Rosh Yeshiva (administrative headmaster and spiritual leader) of Ner Israel Rabbinical College. His mother, Rebbetzin (rabbi's wife) Chana Weinberg has always been highly regarded and over the years became (paradoxically enough) involved in addressing domestic violence in Jewish communities.

Over the last forty years new allegations against Matis Weinberg have come up. Each time the administration at Ner Israel and the family members of Rabbi Matis Weinberg's seem to do what ever they an to down play Weinberg's alleged criminal behavior; at the expense of those he victimized. To this day the administration at Ner Israel are actively involved in protecting alleged offenders and their assets, at the risk of forgoing the much needed protection of their students from potential harm.

Another example is the case of **Rabbi Moshe Eisemann**, past Mashgiach Ruchani (Spiritual Advisor) at Ner Israel Rabbinical College and Yeshiva (See: http://www.theawarenesscenter.org/Eiseman_Moshe). Allegations against Rabbi Eisemann also spans over forty year time period. These allegations have been confirmed by various reliable rabbinic sources.

It is important to keep in mind that in most Jewish Orthodox circles, sex crimes are not reported to law enforcement or child abuse hotlines. Instead, members of these communities tend to bring such matters to their rabbis; Especially if the allegations involve a community

member and even more when someone in a position of power such as a teacher, another rabbi, and/or relative is involved.

Several months ago, several individuals disclosed their sexual abuse histories to the administration of Ner Israel. These individuals clearly stated their concerns that their offender, Rabbi Moshe Eisemann, was still teaching at Ner Israel's high school and living on campus. It was a well known fact that Rabbi Eisemann often tutors students privately in his home, putting teenage boys at risk of harm. The disclosing individuals are currently highly respected individuals.

The Ner Israel administration referred the case to Rabbi Yaakov Hopfer, President, Va'ad HaRabbonim (The Jewish Religious Court of Baltimore). After interviewing the alleged survivors, Rabbi Hopfer made a decree that Rabbi Moshe Eisemann needed to "be retired" from teaching at Ner Israel. Rabbi Moshe Eisemann suddenly resigned, yet continues to live on the Ner Israel campus. To this day Rabbi Eisemann tutors students. Each day that goes by puts the boys on campus and those he tutors at risk of harm.

Rabbi Moshe Eisemann continues to work in the field of Russian Jewry. He is providing outreach to Russian immigrants who have children. There is also a realistic fear that Rabbi Eisemann will return to the former Soviet Union. Russian children also need to be protected from harms way..

Dealing with sexual violence in Jewish communities is still very much in its infancy. Survivors and their families are still being bullied and intimidated into silence, as are those who advocate for them (*See: <http://theawarenesscenter.org/bullying.pdf>*). It takes years for most survivors of a sex crime to be in an emotional space to even think of bringing civil litigation's against their perpetrators. That is especially true in communities where speaking up about sexual victimization still carries a stigma and real risk of shunning.

Please consider all the information provided and vote YES to SB 575.

Please give Maryland survivors of childhood sexual abuse a chance to have their voices heard and the opportunity to be compensated for their pain and suffering.

Sincerely,

Vicki Polin, MA, ATR, LCPC
Executive Director, The Awareness Center, Inc.
www.theawarenesscenter.org