Childhood abuse

A filing deadline should not erase a survivor’s civil claim before it can safely be understood or asserted.

THE POSITION

Short limitation periods can close the courthouse before a survivor can understand, name, or safely address childhood abuse. That procedural cutoff denies a meaningful chance to seek civil accountability. Matilda Law supports no deadline for civil claims based on childhood sexual, physical, or emotional abuse.

Vermont allows claims at any time for childhood sexual abuse and for physical abuse that meets its aggravated-assault standard. Pennsylvania and New Jersey provide long filing periods, measured from adulthood, for certain childhood sexual-abuse claims. Matilda Law supports a broader rule: no time limit, and no rule that treats emotional abuse as less serious than other childhood harm.

SOURCES

Vermont, 12 V.S.A. § 522

Allows claims at any time for childhood sexual abuse and for physical abuse that meets the law’s standard.

Pennsylvania, 42 Pa.C.S. § 5533

Gives survivors more time after turning 18 to bring certain childhood sexual-abuse claims.

New Jersey, N.J.S. 2A:14-2a

Gives survivors a longer period after turning 18 to bring childhood sexual-abuse claims.

GENERAL INFORMATION

This guide gives general information, not legal advice or representation. Laws and deadlines vary by place and circumstance. Check current official sources before acting.