Appendix H: Letter to Politician

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Appendix H
Letter to Politician

Reform legislation is imperative if we are to protect children against incest and sexual abuse. I urge readers to send this letter, or some version of it, to their political representatives at the state level, including governors and legislators.

Dear

The children of our state need your help. According to the most reliable studies of the incidence of incest and child sexual abuse in the United States, at least one out of three girls and one out of seven boys will be sexually abused before the age of 18. Research has shown that 89 percent of these assaults are committed by someone the child knows, trusts, or loves. In spite of the crippling damage done to victims, incest often carries lighter penalties than other child sex-abuse crimes. I urge that all the laws in our state pertaining to incest and to any and all sexual assaults against children be viewed and strengthened, and ask you to take the following steps as soon as possible.

1. Expand the definition of incest in our state in order to broaden the application of criminal statutes. Most states require vaginal penetration (assumes victim is always female) and a close blood relationship to establish incest in a criminal prosecution. The definition should be ex-
panded to include any other acts of sexual assault by a parent or family member and any and all sexual assaults by any care giver—including stepparent, adoptive parent, and guardian of either sex—or any other person in a position of authority.

2. *Increase criminal penalties for incest and child sexual abuse.* Incest and sexual-abuse victims suffer long-lasting psychological and physical trauma. Penalties should be at least equal to those for capital crimes, and minimum sentences for perpetrators should be set by law. Persons convicted of incest and child sexual abuse should be denied custody and/or visitation privileges.

3. *Abolish or extend statutes of limitations for civil and criminal cases pertaining to incest and child sexual abuse.* Some states have recently extended their statute of limitations for civil cases (see the California Code of Civil Procedure, Section 340.1). At least seven states have no statute of limitations in criminal cases, and legislation to abolish such statutes is pending in ten others. Because the victims are children and because they may be terrorized into silence and/or may repress memories of sexual assaults for many years (studies have shown the average age of discovery to be between 29 and 49), statutes of limitations should be based on the special circumstances of the crime or case.

I ask you to reform our laws and give our state prosecutors and child victims a real chance for justice.

Sincerely,