

Two sordid abuse cases involving local priests begs for a review of state limits on the prosecution of sex crimes against children, as we see it. In both instances, the law's reach is limited due to the period of time between the alleged incidents and their reporting to authorities.

Statutes of limitation, as these windows for prosecution are known, are grounded in sensible law. Often, if an unreasonable amount of time passes between the criminal act and the bringing of charges, witnesses may have died or moved, memories grow old and the need for justice is less keenly felt. Removing all statutes of limitation would quickly clog up the legal system.

Yet there are exceptions, such as the taking of another human life. And there should be others to cover cases such as the ones that have recently rocked the Muskegon Catholic community family. Among those exceptions should be any rape, molestation, torture or first-degree criminal sexual conduct cases where the victim is a minor child.

The Muskegon cases concern two priests who have since been removed from their ministries. One has been placed on sabbatical "for health reasons." That priest served in the Muskegon Heights Parish at Sacred Heart Catholic Church in 1976 and 1977, and is accused of sexually abusing young boys. The second accused priest, who also has been defrocked, served at St. Jean Baptiste Catholic Church at the time of the alleged abuse of a young boy who stayed overnight at his home.

We say "alleged" in both cases because with no charges having been brought and no trials held, there is still a presumption of innocence.

Cases involving children may need additional time to develop legally due to their special and sensitive nature. But the two cases cited above suggest lawmakers need to revisit current statute of limitation laws, with an eye towards changing these if it allows sexual predators getting off the hook for their crimes.