

THE PRESS-ENTERPRISE



D4 **Testing tensions**

Students should support their classmates' quest to graduate, says an inland teacher.

PERSPECTIVE

SECTION



SUNDAY
APRIL 2, 2006

D4 • SUNDAY, April 2, 2006

PERSPECTIVE

THE PRESS-ENTERPRISE

Molestation cases need to have limits

BY R. ADDISON STEELE II

I am responding to a letter advocating support for "Tina's Bill," which apparently proposes eliminating all statutes of limitation for child-molestation cases ("Support Tina's Bill," Your Views, March 17).

The author of the letter was the mother of the person who accused my client. My client's case is similar to almost all child-molestation allegations in that the accusation was made years after the alleged conduct. It occurred after a bitter divorce and during a custody battle.

Support of such a proposal is ill-advised. Statutes of limitation exist because of recognition by the law that it is virtually impossible for people to defend themselves against allegations from years prior.

Imagine being accused of a crime that allegedly occurred on March 19, 1976. Can you account for where you were? Do you have witnesses that will come to court and testify to where you were and what you were doing on that day?

In my client's case, the accuser couldn't even give a date for the accusation, just something to the effect that it happened when she was in a range of school grades.

There is no statute of limitation for murder because it is a different type of crime. When a murder occurs, the authorities

usually know that a crime has occurred because there's a dead body. They then collect forensic evidence from the scene near the time that the crime was committed. That evidence is saved forever. If a person is later found to match that evidence, they can be charged.

There is no evidence collected at the time of a child molestation when it is reported 10, 15, 20 or more years later. There is simply no evidence except what the accuser says, and the accused only has his or her word with which to defend against the charges.

So before supporting "Tina's Bill" consider if you or anyone you care about has been through an ugly divorce or child-custody battle and how false allegations are hurled with little thought.

The penalties for child molestation are severe. Almost all cases result in long prison sentences, and many cases carry life sentences. Statutes of limitation exist to protect everyone in our society. So unless you trust with your life every one of your relatives, every neighbor you've ever had, and every child you've ever been around not to have a reason to make a false allegation of molestation, support of "Tina's Bill" is a bad idea.

R. Addison Steele II is a Canyon Lake resident and the attorney for Donald Nelson.