**When will we ever learn?**

When will we ever learn? That is the question that came to mind when I read the details of the sexual abuse allegations against former state legislator, Brandon Hixon, who killed himself earlier this month. His first young victim, at the time a 10 year old girl who was Hixon’s neighbor, told her mother about the molestation she had suffered and *she* was the one sent to a counselor. Why don’t we believe the children?

Hixon’s other known victim, a now teenage relative whose abuse started at age 4 or 5, displayed classic signs of having been abused. She refused to go to the Hixon home and avoided going near it. In hindsight her parents can now see why. Why do most of us not see what is right in front of our eyes?

Over one hundred girls and women testified in court against USA Gymnastics’ team physician, Larry Nassar, who exploited his position to sexually abuse the girls. Many of these elite athletes say that both USA Gymnastics and Michigan State University, where the doctor was employed, knew about the allegations but had refused to do anything about them. Many of the now-women told of how their lives had been changed forever as a result of the abuse they suffered at Nassar’s hands. When will society put the lives of these and countless other brave survivors ahead of the reputations and careers of the adults who perpetrate the abuse?

What risks are we all willing to take on behalf of our children and the children in our communities? Is this not our highest calling?

Child sexual abuse has been called a silent epidemic. At least one in ten children in the United States have been and will be sexually abused according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Most of those will never be reported even in situations where an adult has been informed. How can we change this?

The first thing we need to do is believe the children who take the brave step of disclosing. There are very few false allegations.

Next, we need to learn how we can prevent abuse from occurring in the first place. The Idaho Children’s Trust Fund is working with people and organizations throughout Idaho to promote the research based curriculum, Stewards of Children, which teaches steps to prevent and respond appropriately. Over 15,000 Idahoans have been trained in this curriculum. Contact us if you or your organization wants to get trained.

Finally, 36 states have passed legislation to require training of teachers and students in their public schools. This is something for our policymakers to consider. If there is anything good that can come out of the tragedy surrounding Brandon Hixon, I hope it is that we learn how to stop abuse right now.

We have heard many disturbing revelations about child sexual abuse over the past few weeks in Idaho and nationally. As the director of the Idaho Children’s Trust Fund, which is also the state affiliate of Prevent Child Abuse America, I have the privilege of working with people throughout Idaho and the nation who are working to change this. My hope for change is based in their good work.