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**House Bill 974**  
**House Judiciary Committee**  
**Civil Actions – Child Sexual Abuse – Definition and Statute of Limitations**  
**(Hidden Predator Act of 2020)**  
**\*\* SUPPORT \*\***

My name is Catherine Meyers, and I am the Executive Director of the Center for Children, and a licensed counselor with 34 years experience in the child abuse field with both victims and sex offenders. Our agency was one of the first comprehensive child abuse intervention, evaluation and treatment programs in the state, and houses a Child Advocacy Center. Why is this bill important? Why are these cases different than regular civil cases?

Victims don't come forward sooner for many reasons:

- Offenders groom victims to believe this is normal and nothing is wrong with it. They often don't realize that it isn't until they reach adolescence and then they often feel it is too late or that they were at fault
- Offenders groom victims to believe it is their fault. Survivors are often racked with guilt and shame
- Offenders groom the adults around victims to believe they are wonderful persons with the children's best interest at heart. This means victims who tell are many times not believed when the offender is the wonderful parish priest, the phenomenal leader of the youth group, the favored teacher, etc.
- Offenders traumatize children and then the very coping mechanisms that the child mind uses i.e. detachment, disassociation, disavowal, etc. often leads to long term behavioral and social consequences for those victims that are costly for them as adults and for us as citizens.
- Offenders pick victims who they can manipulate the easiest, the victims most likely not to be believed, the victims in their circles, the very children who find it difficult to report.
- Offenders know that the likelihood of getting caught, and the even rarer likelihood of prosecution is minimal
- Offenders work in systems where they have access to children and where either due to numbers or misplaced trust they can operate below the radar
- Offenders most often offend against children they know making it more difficult to prosecute or to seek civil remedies of which there are few for children
- Offenders don't just rape and abuse the children's bodies, they rape and abuse their souls

Child Sexual abuse cases are not product liability, or accidents. They are planned, willful behavior on the part of offenders and the systems that surround them. This bill targets the systems that surround them: those that minimize, cover up, relocate offenders, dismiss victims' reports and in some cases actually protect the offenders. It also allows victims who were not afforded justice as children to seek and receive it when they are most free of the suppressants and emotionally able to do so.



A United Way Organization

I have started every bullet with the words Sex Offenders as the responsibility needs to be placed squarely on the shoulders of where it belongs and no longer over the lifespan burdened on victims. Please support this legislation so that Maryland can join the many states that understand the lifelong impacts of this crime, whether prosecuted criminally or not.

Respectfully submitted,

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Executive Director, Center for Children Inc