



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

**February 20, 2020**

Dear Committee Members:

In 2019, the Maryland House of Delegates stood up for children and survivors of childhood sexual abuse and overwhelmingly passed HB687. Unfortunately, after a tied Committee vote the bill did not move forward in the Maryland Senate. As advocates, prevention experts, survivors and community members, we were certainly dismayed by the outcome. We were however, galvanized by the support we received from members of both the House and the Senate to revisit the bill this year, we found that others were as frustrated as we were by the lack of understanding of the true impact of this legislation. Armed with a broad coalition of support and buoyed by the strong national trend on this issue, we are writing to ask your support for HB974 Hidden Predator Act of 2020.

We have all heard the statistics that 1 in 4 girls and 1 in 6 boys will experience child sexual abuse before reaching adulthood. We've learned through research that the adverse experiences we face in childhood (ACEs), change the structure and function of our brains and have a lasting impact into adulthood. The trauma associated with childhood sexual abuse too often leads to PTSD, alcohol and opioid abuse, depression, suicide and poor educational and employment outcomes. The impact is felt by all of us, according to the CDC, the economic burden of child sexual abuse is over \$9 billion annually.

Across the country, state legislators are recognizing that change needs to happen. Since 2018 one third of states have passed laws extending the civil statute of limitations. And, sixteen states and D.C. have established lookback windows for child sexual abuse claims. Changes in these laws have given adult survivors of child sexual abuse another pathway to healing and justice.

The Hidden Predator Act of 2020 would:

- Eliminate the civil statute of limitations going forward
- Create a lookback window for those victims who have previously barred by the statute of limitations, allowing them to file suit for a period of two years.
- Removes the “statute of repose” making it clear to the courts, the public and survivors that the Maryland General Assembly did not intend to vest constitutionally protected property rights in child sexual predators nor the individuals and organizations that hid predators from discovery and prosecution.

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Maryland has no criminal statute of limitations for felonies, including those involving child sexual abuse. However, criminal and civil proceedings provide different remedies, and both are necessary for justice to be served. Certainly, we can all agree that survivors should have every option available to heal.

Not only does this bill provide support and access for adult survivors, it provides preventative protection to children. On average, an abuser will have over 100 victims in the course of their lifetime. In states where lookback windows were opened, hidden predators were exposed. In Minnesota, under their 3-year lookback window, 125 predators were identified, in California, under their 1-year lookback window, 300 predators were identified. For our neighbors in Delaware, the lookback window uncovered Dr. Earl Bradley, the most active, previously undisclosed predator to date, who as a pediatrician had 1,000 victims.

Collectively we are saying, enough is enough. Those who sexually abuse children, and the institutions that protect abusers must be held accountable. Survivors deserve access to justice. Maryland can and must do better. We urge you to support the successful passing of HB974 in the Maryland General Assembly this year.



Raising families up.



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**Rev Kathy Shahinian**  
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