



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,

On behalf of the No More Stolen Childhoods Board of Directors, thank you for standing up for children and survivors of childhood sexual abuse. Your actions in 2019 to overwhelmingly pass HB687 in both this committee and the Maryland House of Delegates sent a powerful message to survivors and their families that you understood their commitment to seek healing and justice through every available channel. Unfortunately, after a tied committee vote the bill did not move forward in the Senate. We are joining the chorus of nonprofit organizations, survivors groups, advocates and community members to support the successful passage of The Hidden Predator Act of 2020.

For our organization this issue is paramount to our work. The mission of No More Stolen Childhoods is to change the public perception about childhood sexual abuse and to help those abused find fulfillment in their permanently scarred lives. You have all heard the statistics that 1 in 4 girls and 1 in 6 boys will experience sexual abuse by the time they reach their 18th birthday. It is a staggering and sobering statistic. Our organization recognizes that in addition to working to prevent future abuse from happening we also need to work to support adults who were victimized in the past.

The majority of sexual abuse cases go unreported, and as we have seen from recent news stories about sexual abuse in churches and universities, youth serving organizations and doctor's offices, abuse victims who do not get the care they need, at the time of their abuse, carry a lifetime of stressors that can negatively impact their long-term health and wellbeing.

Those long-term impacts translate into real costs, for both the victim and our communities. Researchers at Georgia State University measured the economic costs of child sexual abuse by calculating health care costs, productivity losses, child welfare costs, violence/crime costs, special education costs and suicide death costs. They estimated the total lifetime economic burden of child sexual abuse in the United States to be \$9.3 billion, based on child sexual abuse data from 2015. Research out of the National Institute for Health found that victims of child sexual abuse are twice as likely to commit suicide as those who did not experience this form of trauma. For women, who live through their childhood abuse, and do not commit suicide, the estimated lifetime cost is \$282,734.

Those adults referenced in the research are our colleagues, they are our friends and our family members. Our organization was founded by a survivor of childhood sexual abuse, Wayne Coffey, who did not disclose his abuse until his early 40's. Wayne has testified in the past to the life-changing impact childhood sexual abuse had on his life. Statistically speaking, many adult survivors do not acknowledge their childhood sexual abuse, or seek help, until they are well into their career path, relationships and child rearing. Research tells us that the average age for an adult, who did not disclose as a child, to disclose their abuse is 52.

Our organization knows that getting adults who have been abused into counseling can be a lifeline to healing for them as individuals. It can also provide insight and healing for their spouses, children and friends. While we know that counseling provides a framework for healing for victims of childhood sexual abuse, for some seeking justice through the criminal or civil legal systems gives them the opportunity to face their abuser and to have them held accountable for their actions.

As we work together to support those in our midst who have come forward and sought help for their childhood sexual abuse, we need to be prepared to provide them every avenue to seek justice and healing. To that end, we urge you to support this legislation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Pamela Piro". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Pamela Piro
Board Chair
No More Stolen Childhoods