



Executive Committee

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Support for the Hidden Predator Act (HB974)

TO: House Judicial Committee

FROM: Maryland Catholics for Action (<https://bit.ly/2twFUWV>)

DATE: February 20, 2020

POSITION: Support HB974

Good afternoon. My name is Susan Kerin and I represent Maryland Catholics for Action. We are a coalition of lay and religious Catholics who support victims' rights related to the clergy sex abuse scandal. We feel that our institutional leadership has abandoned our injured brothers and sisters. Our leaders have not provided the transparency and accountability necessary to ensure that these criminal activities will end.

Recent pollings reveal that many US Catholics share our concerns. In a 2019 poll by the Economist, one in three US Catholics reported having an unfavorable view of our leadership. (<https://bit.ly/2HEjKpe>). A Gallup poll also in 2019 noted that 37% of US Catholics are personally questioning whether to remain Catholic because of the scandal. <https://bit.ly/2P9msqR>

It is important to keep in mind that these polls may actually be minimizing laity concerns. That is because most Catholics have no idea how much money and lobbying resources that our leaders have been spending to undermine bills like the Hidden Predators Act. Our leaders often share their legislative priorities on the pulpit, in bulletins, and flock notes. But challenging the HPA is never publicly mentioned.

Victims have shared with us the stigmatizing responses they have received of not being believed, judged or dismissed. Or hearing magnificent statements from the church hierarchy which never materialize into substantive support. The cost burden of this crime lies predominantly on the victims.

Anyone who is Catholic should regard this scandal as an existential issue: We are facing moral bankruptcy. The laity are the treasures of the church. We are the ones that provide the financial offertories and the hundreds of thousands of hours in charitable work. Many of us have an alternative narrative compared to the Bishops and I ask that you consider our voices when you think of the Catholic church.

HB974 The Hidden Predator Act is, first and foremost what all victims of child sexual abuse deserve. Resources and choices to help them heal. But it is also important to us Catholics who feel accountable and heartbroken by this scandal. **Our futures are intertwined.** This committee has an opportunity to solidify Maryland as a leader in children rights and protections rather than a protector of institutions. We urge this committee to issue a favorable report.

We are the "treasures" of the Catholic Church