

**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**

Michelle Powell, RN  
Annapolis MD 21401

It's been over 20 years since I first remembered and then had corroborated my experience of abuse as a 3-year-old by a Jesuit priest in Roland Park, Baltimore City, Maryland. In the beginning it was difficult. Not only did my dearest and closest family members not understand how this could have happened but my spouse wondered why it was so difficult for me.

My experience included regular flash backs and physical pain. It was difficult to concentrate, and fatigue was overwhelming for many years. I needed treatment, my family, faith and friends to get me through 15 years of depression after the initial explosive feeling from remembering. In the process of recovery, I divorced my Catholic husband who was supportive of the Catholic church which hid and protected the abusive priests. This divorce caused additional harm to our toddler son. The most difficult aspect of the rape and abuse that stays with me is that fact that it is still happening to others. We can't abandon the children we are supposed to protect and the adults who have not yet recovered.

Here is some personal experience I would like to share about my recovery:

One of the oddest things about the flashbacks is that the initial memory is this odd thing happening in front of me. Maybe I had closed it up in my mind so much because it's unbearable for 3-year-old to have that kind of an experience. I imagine my mind put the experience in a closed box inaccessible until my brain was able to handle it. The flashbacks were like watching and feeling what I experienced as a 3-year-old. I would be going through my day and these flashbacks of the actual experience of the rape and brutalization would flash before me like watching a movie screen or something, but it was a big movie screen. This happened for months intensely and then for years after that. I wouldn't remember things and then a flash -- the priest telling me after giving me a bath to clean me up from what had happened that if I ever told anyone that I would be struck by a bolt of lightning from the sun.

At the time I was married to someone who was a devoted Catholic. We were at the movies to see a remake of *Great Expectations* and in that movie one of the adult characters threatens a child character with that almost exact same thing I was told - that if you did this thing (tell someone in my case) you would be struck with a bolt of sun lightning and killed. You know for a child that's a profound thing - the sun is always there and potentially it could attack me at any time if I tell, so it was a very effective. Also, the idea that this Jesuit priest took that from that classic story is terrifying. I had seen it in the flashbacks and art therapy drawings I'd done and then when I saw it on the movie screen/my mind, I was just crying unable to contain myself at

the at that matching of the memory. I have seen other victims of childhood rape share having been threatened with harm by their abusers in similar ways.

Over the years I had further corroboration of the experience when the Jesuits hired an ex FBI detective who researched information about the individual who raped and brutalized me. This detective in his interviews found that even though he was unable to prosecute the case, he strongly felt this Jesuit was in fact guilty. It meant a lot to hear that. It meant a great deal to me to have that information; it was helpful.

In the end, one thing that most concerned me was if this person is continuing to harm children. The detective knew another detective in Australia where this guy had escaped to - he told me this guy's in a nursing home he probably isn't going to be living very much longer, so I was relieved.

It's an intense profound experience recovering from having these memories flashback. There is memory loss and confusion and loss of trust. Even now, I have to stop myself because I don't trust people at a deep level. I can trust people superficially but it's like somewhere inside I feel like you can't trust people because you know here's someone who was represented as trustworthy by the church and he did such a thing. He was loved within the family members who were Catholic and was the Church representative who married my parents at the wish of my grandparents. Then, when nobody's looking, behind closed doors, hidden from decent people, he harms a vulnerable child brutalizes and rapes a 3-year-old. Sheltered by the church, in this case the Jesuits, as he had been moved around often. It's incomprehensible. And it didn't just harm me, my brother has told me that he has experienced a lot of symptoms himself and he remembers being told not to move and threatened. He also has had flashbacks. He said that what sticks with him is that he was powerless to do anything to help me even though he heard me being hurt. He's younger than me and he did hear me being hurt, not knowing what it was and it has affected him profoundly as an adult because he couldn't help me.

You know we have done fine despite this. We are successful professionals and we've managed, but this was because of having a dearly loving parent. There was this one incident that one rare time when I wasn't under my parents' watchful care that this happened. One time when they left me in the care of someone that they thought was safe. It's been difficult for my parents, as well of course, because their whole parenting lives were guided by trying to protect us and sheltered our childhood. Then they come to find that this happened. It just tore them up for many, many years and my mom still is troubled with the whole thing.

I wanted to participate in this hearing because the church has played and still plays a role in harboring these terrible priests brutalizing and raping children and teens. I feel that the church would be a much better place for Catholics to practice and better for society if the Catholic Church did not protect abusers of vulnerable children.

Thank you for your concern and for trying to protect children.

For all these reasons, I urge the Committee to issue a *favorable* report on **HB 974: Civil Actions – Child Sexual Abuse – Definition and Statute of Limitations**.