



**The
Family
Tree**

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Raising families up.

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February 20, 2020

Hon. Chairman Luke Clippinger
Hon. Vice Chair Vanessa Atterbary
Judiciary Committee
6 Bladen Street
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

**RE: HB974 Civil Actions -Child Sexual Abuse – Definition & Statute of Limitations
(Hidden Predator Act of 2020)
Support**

Dear Mr. Chair, Madame Vice Chair and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for taking up this important issue again which would eliminate the current age provision on the civil statute of limitations from of an alleged incident(s) of sexual abuse that occurred while the victim was a minor. Statute of limitation reform is one effective strategy to stop hidden child predators that are grooming children in Maryland and will shift the cost of abuse from the victim to those who cause it.

The Family Tree is Maryland's leading non-profit organization dedicated to improving our community by preventing child abuse and neglect. In the forty-five years since The Family Tree first laid roots, the organization's leadership has cultivated a deep understanding of child abuse in Maryland. With national affiliations such as Parents Anonymous®, Prevent Child Abuse America, and The National Exchange Clubs, The Family Tree belongs to a growing network of NGOs across the country devoted to protecting the most vulnerable members of society, its children.

Sexual abuse is a pervasive social problem and a major public health issue in America today according to the U.S. Justice Department and the Centers for Disease Control. Their studies state that 1 in 4 girls, and 1 in 6 boys, may experience sexual abuse by their 18th birthday. An estimated 90% of child sexual abuse goes unreported. Abuse occurs in homes, communities, and institutional settings. Home abuse is committed by relatives and other household members. Institutional abuse happens at the hands of trusted care-givers: teachers, doctors, clergy and coaches. While more children are abused in homes, the institutional abuser has more victims because he has better access and more opportunities.

Sexually abused children suffer from the effects of abuse for the rest of their lives. Substance abuse is common among victims because abusers use alcohol as a means to their end. Others self-medicate with alcohol and drugs. Victims frequently do not complete education, have sporadic employment, cannot manage personal relationships,

and have criminal justice issues. Besides damage to their lives, the abuse has enormous societal and economic costs.

And most importantly, child victims are powerless to stop the abuse. Furthermore, child sexual abuse victims experience enormous shame and numerous other impacts of trauma that delays disclosure of abuse. Most people who experience sexual abuse in childhood do not disclose this abuse until adulthood. (McElvaney, R., Disclosure of Child Sexual Abuse: Delays, Non-disclosure and Partial Disclosure. What the Research Tells Us and Implications for Practice. Child Abuse Rev.. doi: 10.1002/car.2280 (2013).

Here's what the Hidden Predator Act will achieve:

- Eliminate the civil statute of limitations for child sexual abuse claims going forward (for claims arising October 1, 2020 or later).
- Create a look back window for those victims who have been previously barred by the statute of limitations, allowing them to file suit for a period of two years (any such claims must be filed by October 1, 2022).
- Make clear to the courts, the public, and survivors that the General Assembly was unaware of the constitutional implications of so-called "statute of repose" included in 2017 revisions to the child sexual abuse statute of limitations, and did not intend to vest constitutionally protected property rights in child sexual predators or those individuals and organizations that hid predators from discovery and prosecution, allowing them to continue to victimize children.

We all have a role in stopping child sexual abuse. I served as past Chair of the State Council on Child Abuse and Neglect and chaired the Maryland Partnership to Prevent Child Sexual Abuse Campaign, and currently as the co-backbone organization for the Essential for Childhood. In addition to education, prosecution and accountability are the most effective strategies to protect children from sexual abuse.

I urge Maryland to take its place among those states promoting legislation that protect victims from child sexual abuse by delivering a favorable Committee Report. Thank you both and the Committee for considering this reform. If passed, you will have helped identify past and current predators and achieve justice for many victims. Please do not hesitate to contact me if I can assist you in any way.

Thank you,



Patricia K. Cronin, LCSW-C
Executive Director



Charles Roebuck
Board President

