



THE EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF MARYLAND

Testimony of the Rev. Kenneth O. Phelps, Jr.
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Public Policy Network (Diocese of Maryland)

Before the House Judiciary Committee

IN SUPPORT of HB 974

Civil Actions - Child Sexual Abuse - Definition and Statute of Limitations (Hidden
Predator Act of 2020)

February 20, 2020

To Chair Clippinger, Vice Chair Atterbeary, and Members of the Judiciary
Committee:

The following affirmation appear in a February, 2016 policy statement issued by the Episcopal Church: “That we condemn all manifestations and instances of domestic and sexual violence, regardless of the victim or the circumstances. [We] support governmental actions that protect the rights of victims of violent acts and urge all Episcopalians to strive for justice and healing through prayer, advocacy, care, and action.”

The Episcopal Diocese of Maryland strongly supports HB 974.

CHILDUSA, a non-profit think tank based at the University of Pennsylvania, reports that “most child victims disclose their abuse (if at all) at an average age of 52 years of age, and 1 in 4 girls and 1 in 6 boys in the U.S. are sexually abused.” By our current law, if a person who was sexually assaulted as a child grows into adulthood and takes too long to report his or her abuse, the abuser escapes civil prosecution. The perpetrator is free to keep stalking, grooming and abusing children. HB974 will support a victim’s access to the courthouse, irrespective of when the crime was committed.

As of 2019, 45 states have enacted laws addressing the statute of limitations to recover damages (Civil) stemming from child abuse; In Maryland, there is no statute of limitations on prosecuting felony sexual offenses. (Criminal) According to CHILDUSA, there are currently 11 states considering bills to eliminate the civil statute of limitations.

The Episcopal Diocese of MD is committed to recognizing and reporting abuse and neglect as part of our Safeguarding God’s Children program. This program is designed to help people recognize, report, and, perhaps most importantly, prevent



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abuse and neglect of our children and youth. The Diocese supports behaviors and practices that allow members, and participants, in the life of congregations and other Episcopal institutions in the Diocese to fully demonstrate love and compassion for children and youth in sincere and genuine relationships.

Someone that victimizes a child should not be able to escape responsibility or accountability for that abuse, especially if closure and healing are our ultimate goals.

We urge a favorable report.