

I would like to thank Delegate Clippinger and the committee for inviting me.

My name is Jean Hargadon Wehner. I've dealt with a tremendous amount of fear to get here today, but I'm here in support of all victims of childhood sexual abuse, myself included.

I was sexually abused and raped at Archbishop Keough High school, between the years of 1967 & 1971, by Father Joseph Maskell and others. Accomplices to these crimes are the institutions that betrayed their trusting faith communities by allowing their children to be left in harm's way. The trauma I endured during those years was so great, that in order to survive, I had to sever from that young victim and bury her deep within my subconscious.

In Spring of 1992, at 38 (the age of the current statute of limitations), I felt as if a 14-year-old girl sat down next to me and said, "I have something to tell you." I then began "throwing up memories". For your information, these repressed memories and their effects that continue to surface to this day, may be triggered by a photo, a smell or a place. These disgustingly detailed images and thoughts do not present themselves in a chronological fashion. As the memory unfolds, I feel on multiple levels, that I am going through that horrible experience for the first time. And then the real work begins...

Later that year I had a number of meetings with church representatives. At two of those meetings I gave formal statements pertaining to the abuse. Following the first one, Joseph Maskell, who was in his 50s, was removed from his parish and sent for evaluation.

In 1994 I agreed to file a civil suit against Joseph Maskell, the Archdiocese of Baltimore and The School Sisters of Notre Dame

with Teresa Lancaster. I said yes, not to bankrupt the Catholic church, but because Maskell had returned to work as a pastor to a neighboring parish. I was upset that he was around kids, and the thought that he was in the area and knew that I had told the "secret" terrified me. I had visions of him shooting me and my family with the gun he threatened me with at Keough.

Another reason was that the statute of limitations in 1971, which we were bound by, stated we had to report abuse within 3 years of it ending. I couldn't imagine I was expected to report something I didn't remember. Since my memories of abuse at Keough began in 1992 I believed I was still in the permissible time frame.

We lost the case in 1995 due to the court's decision that repressed memories were not scientifically proven, keeping the statute of limitations intact. As victims we need to know that perpetrators will be held accountable when found out. If not, their threats that "no one will believe us" or "we're liars", are reinforced. This decision undermined my, and many others', health progress for years. It sent us back into hiding!! Because the science behind the *effects trauma has on the brain* has grown, and repressed memories have become accepted, I think having a statute of limitations imposed on victims of childhood sexual abuse is not fair to the victims, while it benefits the perpetrators.

I ask each of you to please vote to pass bill # HB974.