



ARCHDIOCESE OF BALTIMORE † ARCHDIOCESE OF WASHINGTON † DIOCESE OF WILMINGTON

**February 20, 2020**

**House Bill 974 - Civil Actions – Child Sexual Abuse –  
Definition and Statute of Limitation (Hidden Predators Act 2020)**

**House Judiciary Committee**

**OPPOSE**

The Maryland Catholic Conference represents the public policy interests of the three dioceses serving Maryland, including the Archdiocese of Baltimore, the Archdiocese of Washington, and the Diocese of Wilmington, which together encompass over one million Marylanders. We offer this testimony in opposition to House Bill 974, in its current form.

At the outset, we wish to acknowledge the tremendously painful and emotional nature of the issue of child sexual abuse, the courage of the survivors of sexual abuse who advocate for changes in the law regarding the civil statute of limitations for cases involving child sexual abuse, and our sorrow for all those who have suffered through contact with anyone involved with the Catholic Church.

It is with great reluctance that we submit this testimony in opposition to the legislation before you. We feel compelled to oppose the current version of this legislation, specifically the unconstitutional provision to open a two-year retroactive window allowing civil cases of child sexual abuse to be brought forward regardless of how long ago they are alleged to have occurred.

We have noted in connection with past legislation that eliminating the civil statute of limitations retroactively raises serious equity concerns and is particularly unnecessary in Maryland which does not have a criminal statute of limitations on child sex abuse. Maryland is one of few states that have no statute of limitations for felonies, and thus perpetrators of sexual abuse can be rooted out and victims can have their day in court at any time until the death of the perpetrator, regardless of how long ago the sexual abuse occurred.

While there is clearly no financial compensation that can ever rectify the harm done to a survivor of sexual abuse, the devastating impact that the retroactive window provision will potentially have by exposing public and private institutions - and the communities they serve - to unsubstantiated claims of abuse, cannot be ignored.

While the Catholic Church has worked to both address the past and protect the present and future, as the attached handout indicates, there are likely no words of apology; no amount of financial compensation; no assurances of current or future accountability, transparency or child protection measures that will win back the trust of many within and without the Catholic Church when it comes to the Church's past transgressions regarding childhood sexual abuse. While we recognize that our opposition to the current version of House Bill 974 risks the further erosion of that trust, we cannot in good conscience remain silent about the potential this legislation has to jeopardize the good works of so many who give of their time and efforts on behalf of the Catholic Church to reach out to those served by the Church's myriad social service, educational, health and spiritual ministries.

We urge you to consider this legislation in light of the considerations we have outlined here, and to give House Bill 974 an unfavorable report, in its current form.