

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 1
Civil Actions – Child Sexual Abuse – Definition, Damages, and Statute of Limitations
(The Child Victims Act of 2023)

****SUPPORT****

TO: Hon. Luke Clippinger, Chair, and members of the House Judiciary Committee
FROM: Sarah Conway
DATE: March 2, 2023

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before the committee in support of The Child Victims Act (HB 001). I'm a survivor of sexual abuse by two teachers at The Key School here in Annapolis. The abuse began when I was 14 and continued for one year.

An independent investigation concluded that at Key 10 people in positions of authority sexually exploited 16 students and that in all but one of these cases, faculty, staff, administrators, or board members were aware of the abuse and chose to remain silent rather than intervene or report it.

It may be hard to conceive of how hostile the environment was for victims in the past. Even now when we report we may face tremendous blowback from our school or church community and law enforcement prosecutes only a tiny percentage of our cases.

When my parents confronted Key about the abuse, the school only shrugged. When they consulted the AACo. State's Attorney at the time, he strongly dissuaded them from contacting law enforcement because of how harshly victims were treated in those days. The quote I remember was "she will be destroyed on the stand."

The civil statute of limitations expired for me at 21 when I still had few words for the pain and confusion I felt. In 1993, I did speak out publicly and was met with a wall of victim blaming and the school denied institutional responsibility. In 1997, I detailed my abuse to A. A. County Police and specifically pointed out that it was common practice at Key, Yet no investigation was ever done. Police interviewed me again in 2018. 2019 the State's Attorney's office interviewed me. Still no action. They said, despite the teachers penetrating me every which way, they were unsure Maryland law considered them felony crimes at the time.

Being turned away, silenced, and shamed by one's school and law enforcement over decades is devastating—it is the very definition of institutional betrayal which research now shows magnifies the harm caused by sexual abuse. Institutions are causing real, measurable harm not only by allowing the abuse to occur but by silencing the victims.

HB 1 would allow us to have our voices heard at last.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge a favorable committee report and passage of Senate Bill 686 without amendments.