



THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

**Support:** HB 623- Criminal Law- Possession of Child Pornography- Penalty

Chairman Clippinger, Vice-Chair Atterbeary and Members of the House Judiciary Committee:

I come to you today to discuss a bill that should be considered common sense-- strengthening our state's laws against Child Pornography.

As you may recall from bill testimony last year, our great state has some of the most lax laws in relation to child pornography. In fact, Maryland is only one of seven states where possession of child abuse pornography is only misdemeanor.

The other 43 states- including Virginia, Pennsylvania, Delaware, and DC- recognize the seriousness of this offense and believe that it's appropriate to charge this type of offense as a felony.

That is the aim of HB 623, to strengthen our laws by elevating possession of child pornography to a felony offense.

If you assume that our state doesn't have a serious problem with distribution of the images of children's sexual abuse, you'd be wrong. Just last year, according to the Judiciary, more than 1600 violations of possession of child pornography were filed in the District Court and the circuit courts.

The way the law is written now, someone who has amassed a large collection of child porn, with images into the thousands as these types of collections often are, and could only be charged with a misdemeanor because it was their first offense.

In this committee, we have frequently discussed increased sentences, often evaluating these types of bills in terms of retribution, incapacitation, rehabilitation, deterrence, and restoration.

With this in mind, stronger sentencing for possession of child porn is more appropriate. Not only do the victims suffer unimaginable pain immediately and directly from their abuse, but the reality is, in a digital age, no one ever stops being a victim of child porn. Survivors are unable to escape the reach of the images, and constantly live with the knowledge that any person they meet could have viewed the image of probably the most horrifying moment of their life. Images remaining online could impact employment, relationships, and other facets of life throughout the lifetime.

According to a 2017 study of 150 survivors of child pornography, one fifth had been approached in person by someone who had watched a video or seen an image of their assault.

We need laws that address the reality of criminal behavior and technology in 2020. HB 623 is a step in the right direction and provides the tools needed to protect our children and communities from sexual abuse.

I urge the Committee's favorable report.