

House Bill 974- SUPPORT

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

Testimony of Adam Rosenberg, Executive Director, Baltimore Child Abuse Center
February 20, 2020

Baltimore Child Abuse Center (BCAC) supports House Bill 974. This bill extends Maryland's statute of limitations (SOL) to allow adult victims of child sexual abuse the ability to take civil action when they are ready to remedy the trauma they endured in childhood. It also provides a temporary "look-back" window that would suspend the SOL for all claims for two years.

As Maryland's oldest accredited children's advocacy center, BCAC provides trauma-informed services with a multidisciplinary team approach that includes law enforcement, forensic interviewers, social service workers, prosecutors, family advocates, and medical and mental health providers. Since its inception over 30 years ago, BCAC has provided services to over 40,000 children and their families, most of them children reporting that they have been victims of child sexual abuse. BCAC has also trained thousands of professionals who work with youth on how to prevent, identify and report child abuse.

Only one-third of child abuse victims report what happened to them while they are still minors. Some never report at all. It is usually not until adulthood that a child has the emotional, mental and financial stability to confront their attackers – predators who almost always occupied a position of trust, power and care. **The average disclosure age for reporting child abuse is 52 years old.**

Bolstered by national attention to historic and terrible cases of abuse, along with the #MeToo movement, more adult survivors are coming forward years after their abuse. Sexual abuse is most often committed by family or household members, but also by those in authority such as a teacher, babysitter or coach. In many cases, the perpetrator is deceased. Healing takes many forms. And while very few victims wish to pursue court action, for those that do, it is often too late. Maryland's current SOL generally bars claims at age 25, or age 38 for claims with gross negligence. Md Code, Cts. & Jud. Proc. § 5-117.

Left untreated, childhood trauma can have lasting effects on a person's social development, and physical and mental health. It is estimated that the annual public cost due to child maltreatment including, child sex abuse and neglect, is \$1.5 billion in Maryland. Long terms costs stemming from child sex abuse are estimated to be about \$200,000 to \$800,000 per victim. An extended SOL can help shift the burden of paying those costs to the perpetrators and the institutions that hid their crimes. Notably, this proposed solution does not equally reach all hidden predators, such as public institutions shielded by Maryland's sovereign immunity laws and caps of awards. Nonetheless, it can help those few victims seek legal help from the courts against some perpetrators and help expose the full extent of a predator's crimes.

We respectfully urge a favorable report on HB 974.