



# THE EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF MARYLAND

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## Support

SB134 Civil Actions - Child Sexual Abuse - Definition and Statute of Limitations

Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

Testimony presented by Rev. Kathy Shahinian

Episcopal Diocese of Maryland

2/02/2021

Chairman William Smith, Jr. and members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee, the Episcopal Diocese of Maryland strongly supports SB134 – Civil Actions – Child Sexual Abuse – Definition and Statute of Limitations.

Someone that victimizes a child should not be able to hide behind time. SB134 is about doing the right thing for those individuals traumatized through sexual abuse in the state of Maryland. If a person who was sexually assaulted as a child grows into adulthood and takes too long to report his or her abuse, the abuser escapes civil prosecution. The perpetrator is free to keep stalking, grooming and abusing children.

The Episcopal Diocese of MD is committed to recognizing and reporting abuse and neglect as part of the Safeguarding God's Children program. This program is designed to help people recognize, report, and, perhaps most importantly, prevent abuse and neglect of our children and youth. The Diocese supports behaviors and practices that allow members, and participants, in the life of congregations and other Episcopal institutions in the Diocese to fully demonstrate love and compassion for children and youth in sincere and genuine relationships. We recognize that relationships are the foundation of Christian ministry, and that community is central to the life of the church. The Diocese is committed to providing safe places for children, and youth, to grow in their life in Christ. The arguments to support SB134 are as follows:

As of 2019, 45 states have enacted laws addressing the statute of limitations to recover damages (Civil) stemming from child abuse;

In Maryland, there is no statute of limitations on prosecuting felony sexual offenses. (Criminal)

According to CHILDUSA, a non-profit think tank based at the University of Pennsylvania, there are currently 11 states considering bills to eliminate the civil statute of limitations.

CHILDUSA also reports that “most child victims disclose (if at all) at an average age of 52 years of age, and 1 in 4 girls and 1 in 6 boys in the U.S. are sexually abused.”

SB134 supports a victim's access to the courthouse, irrespective of when the crime was committed. The current law, as written, defends and protects predators. Abolishing the statute of limitations for sex crimes against children will not solve the problem of child sexual abuse overnight in our country, but it will arm society with the vehicle to protect our children. Society's need to identify and apprehend child sex offenders does not expire with time, and neither should a victim's access to justice.

We urge a favorable report and passage of SB134 without amendments.