

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 0134:  
CIVIL ACTIONS – CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE – DEFINITION AND STATUTE OF  
LIMITATIONS

\*\*SUPPORT\*\*

TO: Hon. Chairman William C. Smith, Jr, Hon. Vice Chair Jeff Waldstreicher, Senate  
Judiciary Proceedings Committee

FROM: Jean Hargadon Wehner

DATE: January 5, 2021

I would like to thank Delegate Smith and the committee for inviting me.

My name is Jean Hargadon Wehner. I am an advocate for all victims of childhood sexual abuse, myself included.

I first experienced sexual abuse, between the ages of 3 and 12, by a maternal uncle. After I started at Archbishop Keough High school, I was ‘picked up’ out of a confessional, then sexually abused and raped between the years of 1967 & 1971, by the school chaplain, Father Joseph Maskell, Father Neil Magnus and others. Accomplices to these crimes are the institutions that not only betrayed their trusting faith communities by allowing their children to be left in harm’s way, but also colluded with the abusers then covered up the truth. The trauma I endured during those years was so great, that in order to survive, I had to sever from that young victim and bury her deep within my subconscious.

In Spring of 1992, at 38 (the age of the current statute of limitations), I felt as if a 14-year-old girl sat down next to me and said, “I have something to tell you.” I then began “throwing up memories”, which plunged me into ongoing extensive therapy. These repressed memories that continue to surface and be worked on to this day, may be triggered by a photo, a smell or a place. These disgustingly detailed images and thoughts do not present themselves in a chronological fashion. As the memory unfolds, I feel on multiple levels, that I am going through that horrible experience for the first time. And then the real work begins...

Later that year I had a number of meetings with Catholic church representatives. At two of those meetings, I gave formal statements pertaining to the abuse. Following the first one, Joseph Maskell, who was in his 50s, (far from a feeble old man) was removed from his parish and sent for evaluation.

In 1994 I agreed to file a civil suit against Joseph Maskell, the Archdiocese of Baltimore and The School Sisters of Notre Dame with Teresa Lancaster. I was Jane Doe – she was Jane Roe. I said yes, not to bankrupt the Catholic church, but because Maskell was returned to work as a pastor to a neighboring parish. I was upset that he was around kids, and the thought that he was in the area and knew that I had told the “secret”

terrified me. I had visions of Father Joseph Maskell shooting me with the gun he threatened me with at Keough. \*

\*\*Maskell sat across from me at a table and slowly took bullets out of a revolver. He then put the gun to my temple and pulled the trigger. He said, 'If my father ever found out about my whoring around he'd do the same thing, but leave the bullets in the gun.'

Another reason was that the statute of limitations in 1971, which we were bound by, stated we had to report abuse within 3 years of it ending. I couldn't imagine I was expected to report something I didn't remember. Since my memories of abuse at Keough began in 1992 I believed I was still in the permissible time frame.

We lost the case in 1995 due to the court's decision that repressed memories were not scientifically proven, keeping the statute of limitations intact. As victims we need to know that perpetrators will be held accountable, whenever they are found out. If not, their threats that "no one will believe us" or people will say "we're liars", are reinforced. The court's decision undermined mine, and many others' health progress for years. It sent us back into hiding! Because the science behind the *effect's trauma has on the brain* has grown, and repressed memories have become accepted, I think having a statute of limitations imposed on victims of childhood sexual abuse is not fair to the victims, while it benefits the perpetrators and their enablers.

For these reasons, I urge a favorable committee report and passage of Senate Bill 0134 without amendments.

Sincerely,

Jean Hargadon Wehner