

To: Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

From: Rachel White, Advocates for Children and Youth

Re: Senate Bill 134: Civil Actions-Child Sexual Abuse- Definition and Statute of Limitations (Hidden Predator Act)

Date: February 2, 2021

Position: Support

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill 974: The Hidden Predator Act. Advocates for Children and Youth supports this bill as it works to eliminate the civil statute of limitations for child sexual abuse survivors and creates a look back window of two years for those survivors originally barred by the current statute of limitation.

This bill helps to provide justice for victims ready to come forward, shifts the cost of abuse from the victim to those that have caused it, identifies hidden predators, educates the public about the child sexual abuse epidemic, and arms trusted adults to protect children. This bill is preventative and may act as a deterrent for future abuse.

There are claims that passing this bill will bankrupt institutions such as the Catholic Church and prevent the church from providing necessary services and supports to the most underserved communities. This is simply not the case. In fact, nearly 77% of Catholic Charities of Baltimore revenue comes from governmental agencies as payment for services provided; these funds may not be used to pay victims settlements or judgments. This bill would have no effect on the Church's ability to provide social services.

With respect to servicing the most under-resourced communities, a double-edged sword is created where victims must choose between coming forward and exposing their abuser and receiving much needed services to survive. For survivors of color, who often face additional social and cultural barriers to coming forward on their own, the lack of concerted outreach on behalf of the church means less public exposure and potentially, more opportunities for abuse to go on, undetected.

According to Brian Clites, a leading scholar on clergy sexual abuse and professor at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland: "the church has demonstrated a pattern of funneling predator priests to economically disadvantaged communities of color, where victims have much more to lose if they report their abuse. They are less likely to know where to get help, less likely to have money for a lawyer to pursue that help and they are more vulnerable to counterattack from the church, which will hire investigators against the survivors."

Maryland must work to end the exploitation of communities of color. Survivors deserve the right to be heard and should not have to bear the costs of their recovery or have to choose between coming forward to share their abuse or receiving much needed services. Eliminating the statute of limitation and allowing for a 2-year lookback window will help to encourage victims to come forward and reap the recourse that they deserve. For the reasons stated above, we ask that you issue a favorable report on SB 134.