

Testimony in SUPPORT of the Hidden Predator Act SB134/HB974

My name is Patricia Stallings Mills and I was raised in Silver Spring Maryland. It was a close-knit neighborhood centered around the local Catholic Church. I attended 12 years of school in the Archdiocese of Washington and was an active member of my Church in Ellicott City after moving there in 1992. My father was an ordained Permanent Deacon in the Church and after pleading guilty, was convicted of sexual abuse, rape and incest of minors in 2008.

When I was a child I witnessed the rape and abuse of my older sister as we shared a bedroom. To a 7-year-old child this is confusing and scary. The inability to process what I saw was horrifying and caused me to assume I was crazy. I was beaten repeatedly after asking my father to explain what he did to my sister. When my father began to sexually abuse me I was petrified. So scared and intimidated by the power he had over me that I became silent. The beatings continued and so did my silence.

After my mother's death in December of 2006 my siblings and I tried to make sense of old memories that "were never to be talked about" outside of our family. My 3 siblings and I are still very close and were now adults and yet were shocked to uncover the memories that each of us had hidden for 30 plus years. Then the question that still sends me to tears. What if we were not the only victims? My father was still a very active deacon at the church up the street and still in the elementary school there almost daily. He primarily ministered to children and teens.

Panicked and unsure where to turn we called the Montgomery County Police. They executed a phone sting where my father admitted to raping my sister over 60 times and assured her that I would never speak about what I experienced as a child. MD District Attorney Donna Fenton walked us through the next few months. His arrest became newsworthy and after that our worst nightmares came true. More victims came forward including cousins and other girls from the church. They had all lived in the shame and silence of sexual abuse. As this case was president setting, they moved carefully towards the trial with kindness and dignity to my family. All I could think was, "What if I had been able to speak up as a child"? Maybe, there would not have been more victims after us if only I could have known this was not "normal" and not my "fault".

But I speak up now. Yes, long after the abuse and after my father's death while imprisoned in the Eastern Correctional Prison in 2015. Long after nightmares of my father's abuse. Long after years of addiction to relieve the guilt and pain. Long after therapy helping to realize that I am not a monster for being paralyzed by fear as a child. And long after the shame I feel every time I see someone that knew my family as "that family" who hid unspeakable secrets. So how do you put a statute of limitations on the ability of victims to seek the help they so desperately need and deserve? We were told that if the church were to provide the other victims of my father's abuse any help with counseling or other recourses that it would be "An admission that the Church was somehow at fault for allowing my father to have access to these children". This is a real sin. They deserve the right to civil action whenever they need it. When they are ready.

Please recognize that abuse bears no limitations. Piercing the innocence of a child or young adolescent produces permanent scars on a victim's spirit. The course of my life was altered. I was in my 40's when I spoke up. My sister in her 50's and other victims of my fathers' in their 20's. And there are more out there we are now aware of. Please allow our state's youngest victims of sexual abuse the time to give closure to the abuse that has gone on way too long. For all these reasons, I urge the committee to do the right thing for all our State's victims of Sexual Abuse and give SB0134/HB974 consideration.