

**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 134:
CIVIL ACTIONS – CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE – DEFINITION AND STATUTE OF
LIMITATIONS
SUPPORT**

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

FROM: Carolyn Surrick

DATE: 01/25/2021

At thirteen, as a seventh-grade student at The Key School in Annapolis, the grooming started. I was fourteen when I was raped. When I was fourteen and pregnant, I was taken to Washington for an abortion by one of the teachers who was abusing me. I was sexually abused by two different teachers in the same year. The abuse continued until I was nineteen. My facts.

There is no doubt that the sexual abuse of children is horrific, and that specific abuse has specific consequences. It matters how old the child is when it starts. It matters how sadistic the predator is. It matters how long it lasts, and the frequency of the abuse.

No two people who have suffered these experiences are alike, but there are some predictable outcomes - obesity, drug abuse, alcoholism, depression, anxiety, and suicidality. It comes with the territory.

When you are sexually abused as a child, all sorts of things go sideways in your life because every boundary that should be in place, isn't. Many of us never marry. We don't know how to be in committed relationships. We can't open our hearts because we learned early on that it is a terribly dangerous thing to do. If we have children, we live in fear that what happened to us, will happen to them. We are addicted to sex, or we can't trust anyone enough to be intimate. The list goes on and on, and it makes sense. When a child, who is by definition naive and innocent, engages with a predator, bad things happen. Bad things happen when the predator is active, bad things happen when it's over. Due to the extremely destructive messages and a young mind, it takes years, often decades, far longer than any statute of limitations, for sexual abuse victims to fully realize what has occurred, the abuse of power, the trauma, and the damage done.

For the record, I have worked hard to become healthy. Normal. Well adjusted. I've been in therapy for thirty-six years, eight of which were psychoanalysis, four days a week on a couch. I've had acupuncture since 1987.

But I need you to think about justice for a second. The statute of limitations ran out for me when I was twenty, traumatized - and truly, at that moment, I did not recognize, and could not possibly understand, the magnitude of the damage that had been done. It was another twenty years before I started understanding, really understanding, the totality of my experiences.

Starting in 1993, I worked for decades to get Key School to understand how many teachers had abused students, how many students had been abused, the duration of the abuse, and the culture that turned a blind eye to something that was ubiquitous on campus. I was not successful. Not being heard is yet another form of degradation.

Twenty-five years after I first notified a board member about the abuse, the school finally started a formal investigation.

Today, the head of the school is a good man - now there is a fund to help survivors get therapy. And in a letter last year, the board stated that they plan on continuing this indefinitely.

What exactly does that mean? I can tell you what it doesn't mean. It doesn't mean that in five years, the next board will make the same decision. And they have said clearly, that they will not pay for therapy retroactively. Here's the thing: they know that they don't have to. Their legal team told them that they have nothing to worry about because this bill will never pass. They won't have to go to court, they will never be held accountable.

Schools and churches are institutions. At any given moment, they are doing a cost/benefit analysis. Right now, they are helping survivors because the world is watching. In five years, they won't have to.

You are here to bear witness to these people who are telling you that terrible things happened, and the institutions knew. They knew what was going on and they did nothing. And now we, the victims, are asking you to do something. To do the right thing, and pass this legislation. Allow us to seek justice. We've been waiting for a really long time. ***For these reasons, I urge a favorable committee report and passage of Senate Bill 134 without amendment.***

Thank you.

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