

TO: Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

FROM: Kurt Rupprecht, Forest Hill, Maryland

DATE: February 2, 2020

**POSITION: Support SB134**

Dear Chairman Smith and Maryland Senators:

My name is Kurt Rupprecht from Forest Hill, MD and I am here as a Survivor of childhood sexual abuse to state my support for SB134, the Hidden Predator Act.

I was born in Salisbury, MD in 1970. I grew up attending church, actively participating and receiving my childhood sacraments at St. Francis de Sales parish in Salisbury. It was in Salisbury in 1979 that I was groomed, sexually molested and physically assaulted by Father Joseph A. McGovern.

I have testified previously to this committee in detail to the trauma I suffered as a terrified 9 years old boy and the agonizing mental and physical damage I have endured my entire life since those events.

More importantly today I also speak for others from my generation who suffered childhood sexual abuse at St. Francis de Sales. They continue to suffer in silence. I am humbled that since publicly declaring my abuse and speaking out in support of survivors they have reached out to me to speak for them.

Please understand that what significantly helped seal our fates was that we were children of the Diocese of Wilmington who lived in Maryland, not Delaware.

The abuses of the Diocese of Wilmington are well documented. 85% of their Parishes had Predator Priests assigned during the 1960s through 1990s. The Bishops and leadership in Wilmington conspired and covered the abuses as best they could for as long as they could, until 2007 when Delaware passed Statute of Limitations reforms which included a look back window for past victims. In Maryland in 2020 as past childhood abuse survivors we still wait because the abuse we suffered at the hands of that same Institution occurred in Salisbury, 6 miles on the other side of a state line.

Most infuriating as a survivor is the documented knowledge, which was brought to light only because Discovery was required by the State of Delaware's reforms previously mentioned, that the Diocese of Wilmington not only covered and protected their predator priests; but their explicit strategy was to avoid exposure within Delaware by concentrating their predators assignments within the Maryland parishes. Wilmington conducted this program with the knowledge and participation of elements of Delaware law enforcement. They would even send their abusing priests for the occasional psychiatric 'treatment' or 'rest' to Maryland facilities.

The numbers prove this dark reality. During this period the Parishes in Delaware contained 79% of the Diocese members and averaged 2.4 predator priest assignments per Parish. In Maryland, which contained only 21% of the Diocese members, the Parish average was 7 predator priest assignments per Parish.

Especially haunting for me today is knowing of the 59 parishes in the Wilmington Diocese, the one with by far the highest number of predator priests' assignments was... St. Francis de Sales in Salisbury. Two of its' Pastors, Fathers Lind and Irwin, were themselves abusers and considered 'predator mentors' to younger abusive priests which were so frequently assigned to their supervision. Salisbury became a virtual training ground for childhood abuse.

Please know I do not hate the Catholic Church. Because of my emotional wounds I personally can no longer attend Church. Yet I understand the Church is truly made of the people who are my family and friends, countless volunteers, teachers, counselors, caregivers, and many clergy who have my friendship and respect. All those people support me and support this Bill.

SB134 is for all our citizens and no single institution of any kind deserves the power to deny this protection to those of us who are damaged and to our children when they are at their most vulnerable.

Marylanders deserve Justice for our past abuse and the best possible protection for our children in the future. Justice and protection which 23 other states provide for their citizens and 20 more are actively pursuing just as we are here today.

With all my heart I implore you to support this Bill.

Thank you.