

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: Becky Ianni

DATE: 02/02/2021

My name is Becky Ianni. I am on the Board of Directors of The Survivors Network of Those Abused by Priests (SNAP) but most importantly I am a survivor of childhood sexual abuse. I am writing today in support of The Hidden Predators Act (HB263/SB134). I believe this legislation can make a difference that will better protect Maryland's most vulnerable citizens, its children.

I am one of the one in four women who has been sexually abused by the age of eighteen. In 1965 when I was 8 a newly ordained priest joined our parish. Father Reinecke was quiet, charming, and many Mom's thought good-looking. He gave inspiring homilies and was soon everybody's favorite priest.

Father Reinecke befriended our family. He began to spend a great deal of time at our home and in our neighborhood. He would eat dinner at our house 2 or 3 times a week. He would watch T.V. and play board games with me and my brothers. All the parents loved and trusted him. I loved and trusted him. Father Reinecke used this trust and love to sexually abuse me. He was my friend, my own personal representative of God and he betrayed me. He started fondling me and raping me with his hands around the age of 9. He abused me in my own home in and in the vestry of my church, the two places I should have felt most safe. I was so young and naïve that I did not understand what he was doing was sexual in nature I only knew it made me feel like a dirty little girl. The emotion I remember the most is being terrified. I never told anyone as a child. It was implied that if I told anyone God would be mad at me and I would go to hell. Nothing could be worse for a devout Catholic little girl. I was terrified, confused and ashamed. I had been taught that priests were called by God therefore I believed that the abuse was my fault. My terror of going to hell and being found out was so great that I went deep inside myself during the abuse so I could pretend it was not happening and I buried it deep in my mind. He took my innocence and left me terrified, guilt ridden and deeply ashamed. When I finally found the courage to tell someone and to find validation and justice the Statute of limitations had run out.

Unfortunately, my case is not unique. The impact on children and adults is devastating. Victims usually suffer life-long consequences including, poor self-esteem,

inability to trust, excessive anger, frequent addictions, eating disorders, and even reduced cognitive performance. The suicide rate among those who were sexually abused is significantly higher than that of the general population.

As I began to heal with the help of a therapist and my fellow survivors. I decided that I wanted to help other survivors who were suffering in silence and pain. I joined SNAP (survivorsnetwork.org). I am currently a leader in the Washington, DC Metropolitan area and am on the Board of Directors. I have overseen SNAP's helpline for over a decade and have answered hundreds of calls from fellow survivors. Many of those who call are in their 40's, 50's, 60's or older and have never told anyone about their abuse.

Perpetrators are very skilled at evoking secrecy and silence among their victims. For some, denial and self-delusion arouse less shame and pain than facing the events directly. For others, memories are simply repressed from consciousness. In either case, self-destructive behaviors and psychological difficulties are common until one confronts the abuse and/or the abuser. Subjugation of a child through the warped use of religious power can breed an enormous amount of personal responsibility on behalf of the victim. Harboring of irrational feelings of guilt and accountability perpetuate the silence that many victims maintain for years.

We need to create an environment that encourages victims to come forward. They need to feel they will be heard and validated. When victims speak out and expose their perpetrators children are safer. By passing The Hidden Predators Act you will be helping victims to feel heard and be validated. Most importantly you be creating a deterrent for perpetrators and those that cover up their abuse by letting them know that no matter how much time has passed they will be held accountable.

As you are deciding how to vote on this bill, I ask that you not only review all the facts that are presented but to remember the stories you will read that make those facts real. I ask you to remember this little girl and her pain and then decide what you can do to prevent another child from suffering as she did and still does as an adult. ***For these reasons, I urge a favorable committee report and passage of Senate Bill 134 without amendment.***

My picture at the age I was abused.

Thank you,
Becky Ianni
SNAP Board Member
snapvirginia@cox.net
703-801-6044

