

Good Morning,

I'd like to start off by thanking all of you for allowing me this opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 847. I support this bill for many reasons, but primarily because I am passionate about protecting children and preventing the sexual exploitation and abuse of innocent, young lives. It's unfortunate that any of us are here today discussing the need to keep children safe from sexual predators. I think we can all agree that in a perfect world, children would never have to worry about such things. We know, however, that we live in a very imperfect world. This is not a subject anyone really wants to discuss. If we're honest with ourselves, it makes us all very uncomfortable. But I think we need to be uncomfortable. For now, at the very least during this hearing, we all need to sit in the discomfort of this dark, vicious reality.

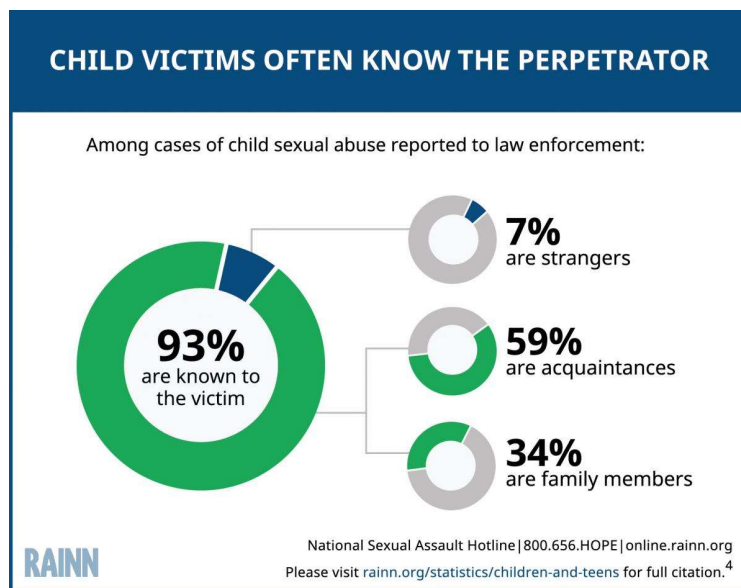
I stand before you today as a survivor of child sexual abuse and a survivor of sexual assault as a young adult. I used to think I was alone, that these terrible things happened only to me. I wish that was the truth because I would never want anyone else to feel the lifelong pain of processing the trauma of sexual abuse and assault. It never leaves you. It may fade every now and then, and if you're lucky, you learn to move on with your life. I have a beautiful life. I have a successful career. I have a loving husband and two beautiful daughters, but there's never been a day when I haven't carried the burden of the trauma I experienced as a young child and teenager. I was abused at a very young age by an adult family member who babysat me. Later, at the age of 19, I was sexually assaulted by someone I believed was my friend. I, like so many others, never reported either case. In fact, you are among the very few people I have ever told about my experiences. I've only recently told my parents about the abuse I suffered as a child, over 30 years ago, and I've never told them about my experience at the age of 19. In fact, only my closest friend and my husband know about both incidents...and now you.

By nature, I'm a very logical and pragmatic person. I'm a credit risk manager by profession, so my job is to analyze and mitigate risk every day. I take a balanced approach in order to achieve my goals, recognizing that it's not reasonable to eliminate all risk so I take a prudent approach based on facts and data. I'm asking all of you to do the same thing here today.

Let's start with some facts.

- There are roughly 750,000 registered sex offenders in the U.S. 250,000 of those are under criminal justice supervision in the community.
- At least half of convicted child molesters admit to sexually assaulting an adult.
- Over 80% of convicted adult rapists report that they have molested children.
- Every 9 minutes, child protective services substantiates a claim of child sex abuse. ***I'd like for everyone to think about that as the minutes pass by during today's session. Think about how many young lives are being broken as we sit here contemplating one way to prevent such tragedies.***
- It's estimated that only 310 of every 1,000 sexual assaults are ever reported to the police. That means nearly 70% of all victims are never even represented. They will suffer alone in silence for the rest of their lives.

- One in 9 girls and 1 in 53 boys under the age of 18 experience sexual abuse or assault at the hands of an adult. **You probably know more victims of sexual abuse than you even realize. Some of you may even be victims.**
- 82% of all victims under 18 are female.
- Females ages 16-19 are 4 times more likely than the general population to be victims of rape, attempted rape, or sexual assault.
- Of all victims under the age of 18, 2 out of 3 (66%) are between the ages of 12-17. The remaining 34% are under the age of 12. **These are numbers, statistics, but I want you to visualize a 12 year old in your life...a 10 year old...an 8 year old...a 5 year old. Visualize those innocent faces. These numbers are those innocent faces. They're not just cold, black letters on a page.**
- Child victims know their perpetrator in 93% of reported cases. The vast majority, 59%, of the known perpetrators are acquaintances – *a neighbor or someone who frequents areas where children congregate, for example.*



The effects of child sexual abuse can be long-lasting and detrimental to the victim's mental health. Victims are more likely than non-victims to experience the following mental health challenges:

- About 4 times more likely to develop symptoms of drug abuse
- About 4 times more likely to experience PTSD as adults
- About 3 times more likely to experience a major depressive episode as adults

(rainn.org/statistics/children-and-teens)

- MD is one of only 12 states in the country with no residency restrictions for sex offenders.
- Our state ranks 10th in the highest rate of sexual abuse cases, with 131.5 sexual abuse victims per 100,000 children.

- 7 of the 12 states with no residency restrictions are in the top 20 states in the nation with the highest rates of sexual abuse of children.

With all of those statistics considered, why wouldn't we, as leaders in our communities, do everything within our power to protect innocent lives from being destroyed? As a society we've recognized that sex offenders pose a unique threat. That threat is the very basis for the nationwide sex offender registry. The registry creates awareness, but that is simply not enough.

Now I'd like to share a story with you that will explain my motivation, and that of my neighbors, to reach out to our local legislators for help. Meet my neighbor, John Doe. That's obviously not his real name, out of respect for his privacy, but he is a real person and his story is 100% true. He's a 40-year old repeat child sex offender, convicted of multiple felonies involving luring children under the age of 14 over the internet to engage in sexual behavior. ***Under the age of 14 – these are elementary and middle school children.***

He was placed on several years of probation in Nebraska before reoffending and subsequently serving 2 years in prison there. He relocated to FL and then in October of 2019 to MD, where he now resides across the street from my 10 & 13 year old daughters.

Mr. Doe's choice of neighborhood seems to lack sound judgement for a person with a predatory history against children. He's a single man with no family, friends or ties to this community. His parents bought the home for him at the same time they relocated from FL to Frederick, MD (about 20 miles south of us). He's unemployed, so he certainly didn't choose this location because it's close to work. He lives in a neighborhood full of children, a park, several daycare facilities and within walking distance of three schools.

I recall seeing Mr. Doe move into the neighborhood in late October of 2019. I had made a mental note to make time to introduce myself and welcome him to the neighborhood sometime over the following week. Before I had the opportunity, on trick or treat night, I received a call from one of my neighbors. Our daughters are friends, but her daughters were spending Halloween with their father and were not trick or treating with mine that year. She wanted to let me know that our new neighbor was a registered sex offender. My heart sank, but I immediately thought there was no way he was a child sex offender because "we obviously have restrictions against those types of offenders living so close to schools and parks and daycares, right?" I was wrong.

I'll admit I'm not a very trusting person. You may have surmised that based on the personal history I shared with you. But even I had not thought to check the offender list for my new neighbor. I was ready to welcome him to the neighborhood and wouldn't have thought twice about my children cordially interacting with him. In fact, the only reason any of my neighbors knows about Mr. Doe's past is thanks to one of the daycare providers in our neighborhood who had the foresight to sign up for the local sheriff's alert system.

I realize there are people who would stand before this same legislative body and argue that child sex offenders should be free to live wherever they choose. They believe offenders have served their time, paid their debt, and haven't reoffended in "X" amount of years, so we should just set aside the threat

and resolve to the fact that there's nothing we can do. Others will say that residency restrictions don't help because victims often know their perpetrator. I believe there are several flaws in those arguments:

1. Yes, they have to live somewhere and we can't cut them off from society. No one testifying here today is advocating for that. We understand that sex offenders have the right to be active members of the community and they should have access to community resources. They can do all of that without living in close proximity to where children congregate.
2. Yes, they've served time but the debt will never be repaid. The damage done to their victims can never be repaired. The sexual abuse and exploitation of a child is a crime so egregious, its effects ripple across communities and entire societies. I believe that more long-term restrictions on these individuals is a fair consequence of their egregious actions.
3. To assume someone hasn't reoffended since his last conviction is to naively assume he was caught at every attempt. Any rational person knows that's not the case. In fact, we know that most sexual offenses go undetected – 69% according to the statistics I cited earlier. I'm not saying we should presume someone's guilt. The presumption of innocence is a fundamental American value that we should all treasure. I do, however, think it's reasonable to believe that past behavior is indicative of future behavior. Beliefs drive behavior, and behavior drives results.

This is particularly relevant to the case of Mr. Doe. He was convicted multiple times. He's proven historically that legal consequences were not an effective deterrent to his urge to reoffend.

Mr. Doe is not alone in this regard. According to a 9-year study conducted by the Bureau of Justice Statistics in 2014, sex offenders accounted for 5% of overall prison releases in 2005 and for 16% of arrests for rape or sexual assault during the 9-year follow-up period. The same study reported that half of sex offenders released from prison had a subsequent arrest that led to a conviction within the 9-year period.

bjs.gov - Data Collection: Recidivism Of State Prisoners

Unfortunately, the recidivism rates are likely significantly underreported because we know the vast majority of sexual offenses go undetected.

4. Cited from the FAQs of the Frederick County Sherriff's Dept website: "Information put out by other states has shown that residency restrictions do not help to prevent sexual offenses from occurring because the victims and the offenders, in most situations, know each other. Having ready access to victims, in private and secretive environments, is how sex offenders thrive."

The holes in this logic are glaring to me. By allowing offenders to move into close proximity of where children congregate, we're giving them ready access to victims, and **allowing them to become someone known to the victim**.

Take, for example, the case that led to Megan's Law. Megan Kanka was a 7 year old girl living in New Jersey until her neighbor, a registered sex offender, raped and murdered her in 1994. Megan's family was unaware of their neighbor's dangerous past. After the tragic loss of their innocent daughter, they fought for a nationwide sex offender registry.

Like all of my neighbors, my husband and I carefully considered where to buy our family home and chose our neighborhood because it is quiet, safe, full of children like ours, and within very close proximity to places where children congregate – schools, parks, bus stops. We all work hard so that we can live in a safe neighborhood for our children. We are law abiding citizens and good stewards of our community. It's disheartening to know that someone who has committed horrible acts against children is able to move in and completely disrupt all of our lives.

For example, my oldest daughter was 12 when Mr. Doe moved in across the street. I used to let her stay home alone while I ran errands. I wanted her to learn to be responsible and independent. That changed when Mr. Doe moved in. I, along with many other parents in the neighborhood, also started to walk down to the bus stop to pick up our children rather than letting them walk unsupervised. Mr. Doe started to coincidentally check his mail and linger outside when the school bus arrived and children walked past his house. He also installed a camera above his garage aimed at the sidewalk where children walk by to get to and from the bus stop. Covid changed that, with virtual learning, but we're now starting back to hybrid two days a week. My 10 year old has asked countless times over the past 15 months to move out of our neighborhood, despite the fact that this is the only home she's ever known. She doesn't feel safe with Mr. Doe across the street.

Let's also consider the daycare providers in our neighborhood. Their livelihoods have been impacted by Mr. Doe's presence. Potential new clients overlook them because of his proximity to their homes. What about anyone who now tries to sell their home? Our homes were built for families in a neighborhood in close proximity to amenities built for children. How many families do you believe would be willing to move in across the street or down the block from a repeat child sex offender?

In the fall of 2019, I began researching residency restrictions and looking for an advocate to represent my children and all of the children in my neighborhood. I was shocked to find many groups advocating for the rights of convicted child sex offenders, even groups that excuse pedophilia as acceptable and normal. What I didn't find was extremely disheartening. I had to dig pretty deep to find someone to advocate for our children. I was fortunate to have the support of many of my neighbors and our local municipal representatives, and I'm here today because of the hard work and diligent efforts of Delegate Cox and his staff. For that I'm extremely grateful, and I'm grateful for the time all of you have given me today.

Mr. Doe made a choice to sexually exploit children. He made that choice multiple times knowing the consequences. Many others make that same choice. I ask you, where is our choice as a community, as parents? Do we have the right to live in peace, away from the threat of individuals like Mr. Doe? What choice do our children have? If he lived across the street from you, your children, your grandchildren...how would you feel, what would you want to be done?

Look at the clock now. How many minutes did it take you to read this testimony? Look back at the statistics I shared at the beginning of this document. How many children could you have potentially saved in the time it took you to read my testimony, just by supporting this bill?

There are countless people advocating for individuals like Mr. Doe. **Will you be an advocate for our children?**

Thank you,

Amanda M. Long

Thurmont, MD

Sources:

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4. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics, Sex Offenses and Offenders (1997).
5. David Finkelhor, Anne Shattuck, Heather A. Turner, & Sherry L. Hamby, *The Lifetime Prevalence of Child Sexual Abuse and Sexual Assault Assessed in Late Adolescence*, 55 Journal of Adolescent Health 329, 329-333 (2014)
6. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics, Sexual Assault of Young Children as Reported to Law Enforcement (2000).
7. H.M Zinzow, H.S. Resnick, J.L. McCauley, A.B. Amstadter, K.J. Ruggiero, & D.G. Kilpatrick, Prevalence and risk of psychiatric disorders as a function of variant rape histories: results from a national survey of women. *Social psychiatry and psychiatric epidemiology*, 47(6), 893-902 (2012).
8. United States Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children's Bureau. Child Maltreatment Survey. Exhibit 5-2 Selected Maltreatment Types by Perpetrator's Sex. Page 65. (2013).
9. U.S. Department of Justice. 2005 National Crime Victimization Study. 2005.