



**The
Family
Tree**

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Raising families up.

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February 23, 2023

Hon. Chairman William C. Smith, Jr.
Hon. Vice Chair Jeff Waldstreicher
2 East
Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE SUPPORT- SB0686 (HB 0001) Civil Actions - Child Sexual Abuse - Definition and Statute of Limitations (The Child Victims Act of 2023)

Dear Mr. Chair, Mr. Vice Chair and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for taking up this important issue again which would eliminate the current age provision on the civil statute of limitations from of an alleged incident(s) of sexual abuse that occurred while the victim was a minor. Statute of limitation reform is one effective strategy to stop child predators that are grooming children in Maryland and will shift the cost of abuse from the victim to those who cause it.

The Family Tree, a proud affiliate of LifeBridge Health Group, is Maryland's leading non-profit organization dedicated to improving our community by preventing child abuse and neglect. In the forty-five years since The Family Tree first laid roots, the organization's leadership has cultivated a deep understanding of child abuse in Maryland. With national affiliations such as Prevent Child Abuse America, and The National Exchange Clubs, Circle of Parents and the Enough Abuse Campaign, The Family Tree belongs to a growing network of NGOs across the country devoted to protecting the most vulnerable members of society, its children.

Sexual abuse is a pervasive social problem and a major public health issue in America today according to the U.S. Justice Department and the Centers for Disease Control. Their studies state that 1 in 4 girls, and 1 in 6 boys, may experience sexual abuse by their 18th birthday. An estimated 90% of child sexual abuse goes unreported. Abuse occurs in homes, communities, and institutional settings. Home abuse is committed by relatives and other household members. Institutional abuse happens at the hands of trusted care-givers: teachers, doctors, clergy and coaches. While more children are abused in homes, the institutional abuser has more victims because he has better access and more opportunities.

Sexually abused children suffer from the effects of abuse for the rest of their lives. Substance abuse is common among victims because abusers use alcohol as a means to their end. Others self-medicate with alcohol and drugs. Victims frequently do not complete education, have sporadic employment, cannot manage personal relationships, and have criminal justice issues. Besides damage to their lives, the abuse has enormous societal and economic costs.

And most importantly, child victims are powerless to stop the abuse. Furthermore, child sexual abuse victims experience enormous shame and numerous other impacts of trauma that delays disclosure of abuse. Most people who experience sexual abuse in childhood do not disclose this abuse until adulthood. (McElvaney, R., Disclosure of Child Sexual Abuse: Delays, Non-disclosure and Partial Disclosure. What the Research Tells Us and Implications for Practice. Child Abuse Rev.. doi: 10.1002/car.2280 (2013).

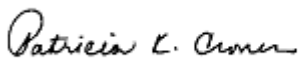
The Child Victims Act of 2023 would:

- Eliminate the statute of limitations for child sexual abuse.
- Repeal the so-called "statute of repose".
- Create a permanent window for older claims.
- Allow both public and private entities to be sued.
- Eliminate the notice of claims deadlines for public entities in child sexual abuse cases.
- The legislation will have some limitations on liability to a single claimant for injuries arising from a single incident or occurrence.

Maryland has no criminal statute of limitations for felonies, including those involving child sexual abuse. However, criminal, and civil proceedings provide different remedies, and both are necessary for justice to be served. Certainly, we can all agree that survivors should have every option available to heal. Not only does this bill provide support and access for adult survivors, it provides preventative protection to children. In states where windows are opened, hidden predators are exposed.

Collectively, we are saying enough is enough. Those who sexually abuse children, and the institutions that protect abusers, must be held accountable. Survivors deserve access to justice. Maryland can and must do better. We respectfully urge you to support the passage of The Child Victims Act of 2023 in the Maryland General Assembly this year.

Thank you,



Patricia K. Cronin, LCSW-C
Executive Director

