

**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 686**  
**Civil Actions – Child Sexual Abuse – Definition, Damages, and Statute of Limitations**  
**(The Child Victims Act of 2023)**

**\*\*SUPPORT\*\***

TO: Hon. William C. Smith, Jr. Chair, and members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

FROM: Nancy Andryszak Fenton

DATE: February 23, 2023

I am one of the 42 million adult survivors of sexual abuse in the United States and I strongly urge you to support SB 686 as it would provide an opportunity for victims of sexual abuse to seek justice from the public and private institutions that failed to protect them as children. SB 686 eliminates the statute of limitations and provides an opportunity to pursue legal recourse for the justice that was denied to so many people. With the passage of this legislation, Maryland would join a growing number of states that have passed similar laws to eliminate the statute of limitations.

More than 50 years ago I was sexually abused by a Baltimore public school teacher who is now serving four life sentences for the rape of a middle school student in a Baltimore Catholic school. The abuse was on-going and torturous. It was often witnessed by my fifth and sixth grade classmates. As an 11-year-old child in the 1969-1970 school year, I had no words to understand what was happening to me. “Sexual abuse” was not a phrase I had ever heard. Today, there is a great deal of scientific knowledge about the long-term impact of childhood trauma. Data and science now drive our understanding of sexual abuse, trauma and the long-term consequences of this heinous, criminal act. This same data has informed the nationwide effort to eliminate the statute of limitations on a state-by-state basis.

Chances are quite high that you know someone in your immediate or extended family, a friend, a member of your congregation or an old classmate who endured sexual abuse as a child. In 2020, a reported 2,059 Maryland children experienced sexual abuse. This is an increase of 3.4% from 2019. The percentage of victims of child sexual abuse in Maryland is significantly higher than the national average of 9%. Don’t let Maryland be a leader in the number of sexually abused children. SB 686 will help today’s survivors access justice for the crimes committed against them and raise public understanding about how to prevent sexual abuse in the future. For these reasons, I respectfully urge a favorable report on SB 686.