

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: David S. Schappelle

DATE: February 23, 2023

My name is David Schappelle, and I strongly support SB 686 as it will give me and so many others an outlet for closure, healing, and assurance.

I currently live in Ellicott City (Howard County), with my wife and five children. My sons are age 16 and 14, and daughters are 12, 10, and 5. I am currently 45 years old. I have a Master of Science degree in Management of Human Resources, and I'm currently the Director of HR at a government contracting firm in Columbia, MD. My wife and I are raising our kids in the Catholic religion, at St. Louis parish in Clarksville, MD (Howard County), where they attend weekly mass, and the kids attend CCD classes towards confirmation.

The other part of my story is one that I just learned about a few years ago; I am a survivor of child sexual abuse, and I had repressed the memories of it until about 4 years ago, in the spring of 2019, and I was 42 years old. Mine and my family's world, was shattered after I began to recall the horrific memories that I had repressed as a kid, of being sexually abused and even raped at gun point by a Catholic priest in 1986 when I was 9.

Over these past four years, much of it during the pandemic and sheltered at home with my family, I relived my trauma through slow and painful memory recollection, and I am still trying to heal all the wounds. I wish that these memories are not real, but they are. I could not deal with this as a child, but even now, it is still unimaginably difficult. Everyone around me sees the intense effects on me, and some in my family even had collateral damage as a result. Visibly, I lost 30 pounds in about a month. Invisibly, my mental pain is still intense. I am managing my PTSD, anxiety, and depression through extensive therapy, counseling, and medications, which has all added up to over \$50k and counting. I'm still piecing together my history.

What I recall so far is that my abuse happened in the fall of 1986, when I was 9, in Gaithersburg, MD (Montgomery County). My family had just moved there, and I was about to start 4th grade in a new school. We started attending mass and religious Ed at St. Rose of Lima Catholic parish. My abuse occurred in religious Ed during weekly "practice" reconciliations which were 1-on-1 with the priest, and in multiple other instances over a few months. One time there was even a second priest involved. Another time I was even raped during a church fall picnic for kids. When he was done raping me, and I awoke from passing out due to the pain, he made me say the Hail Mary prayer with him, told me to pull up my shorts and go back out and play with all the other kids at the picnic, which I did as I was told.

The priest who primarily sexually abused and raped me was Wayland Brown. He was from the Archdiocese of Savannah Georgia, which sent him in 1986 to St. Luke's Institute in Silver Spring, MD to receive treatment for his known pedophilia, yet he continued to have direct and unchecked access to children like me.

He died in prison in 2019, where he was serving sentences for sexually abusing and raping many more children in Georgia and South Carolina at Catholic schools (after he left Maryland and went back home he was assigned to head some schools for children!).

About a few months ago, I recalled the actual moment in 1986 when my mind repressed the memories. It was the very night after being raped earlier in the day, and I laid in bed, looking up at the ceiling, and my 9-year-old self was trying to deal with what happened. My rear was still sore, but I was too embarrassed, confused, and scared to tell anyone what happened. Before falling asleep, I remember now, I told myself to "forget everything that happened, so that I can try to live a normal life like all the other kids - that, I don't want to be any different than anyone else." And so when I went to bed that night and then I woke up the next morning, it was as if nothing ever happened and I never thought about it again and it erased from my consciousness. I never dealt with it...until now.

It is important to no longer sweep away the past, or keep it locked up in a container. Closure to me means having answers, acknowledgement from the accountable parties, and help to pay for my family's continued medical treatment and therapy. This bill will potentially give me and so many others an outlet for that closure. For these reasons, I respectfully urge a favorable report on SB 686.