

Written Testimony of Thomas P. and Tina M. Wilson

RE: In Support of Senate Bill SB0686 - Civil Actions - Child Sexual Abuse - Definition and Statute of Limitations (The Child Victims Act of 2023)

February 22, 2023

As citizens of the state of Maryland, we enthusiastically support Maryland **Senate Bill SB0686**. This testimony seeks to express our rationale for support of **SB0686**. For victims of sexual abuse, justice has been difficult to find. We hope our legislators understand the urgent need to remove age and time constraints on civil claims in Maryland for victims of childhood abuse and support this bill.

As reported by several media outlets, a long running investigation by Maryland's Attorney General Brian Frosh found more than 150 Roman Catholic priests in the Archdiocese of Baltimore have been accused of sexually and physically abusing more than 600 victims over the past 80 years. Frosh identified 115 priests who were prosecuted for sex abuse or that had been identified publicly by the archdiocese as having been "credibly accused" of abuse. Another 43 priests had been accused of sexual abuse but were not identified publicly by the archdiocese.

The information from the investigation that started in 2019 resulted in a 463-page report that is not yet public. The Maryland Attorney General filed a motion in Baltimore Circuit Court to release the report, which includes information retrieved via grand jury subpoenas, but the report has not been released.

As evidenced by the progress of the Attorney General's push for the public release of information from the investigation, justice can be difficult to find for victims of molestation, assault, and childhood sexual abuse. Many survivors don't begin to accept the abuse until they are far into adulthood. Due to this delay, it is normal for adults in their 30s, 40s, or 50s to acknowledge and admit to having been the victim of child sexual abuse. Despite this fact, civil statute of limitations laws around the country have been slow to change to reflect this reality,

Through SB0686, restoring adult victims of child sex abuse's civil claims is a means to ensure that justice is served in cases when the civil statute of limitations has passed, allowing individuals the chance to initiate civil actions if they so choose to correct the wrongs done to them. Older accusations of abuse should be admissible for a variety of reasons, including the importance of maintaining the public's safety. Most directly, abusers and those complicit in enabling them are exposed, helping protect other children from the same fate.

We strongly support SB0686 and believe it absolutely necessary to protect those who have experienced sexual abuse from predator priests.