

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: Sarah R. Conway  
DATE: February 23, 2023

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before the committee in support of The Child Victims Act (SB686). I'm a survivor of sexual abuse by two teachers at The Key School here in Annapolis. The abuse began when I was 14 and continued for one year.

In 2019, an independent investigation concluded that at Key 10 people in positions of authority sexually exploited 16 students and that in all but one of these cases, faculty, staff, administrators, or board members were aware of the abuse and chose to remain silent rather than intervene or report it.

It may be hard to conceive of how hostile the environment was for victims in the past. Even now when we report we may face tremendous blowback from our school or church community and law enforcement only prosecutes a tiny percentage of our cases.

When my parents confronted the school about the abuse, they only shrugged. When they consulted the AACo. State's Attorney, he strongly dissuaded them from contacting law enforcement because of how harshly victims were treated in those days.

The civil statute of limitations expired for me at 21 — when I still had few words for the pain and confusion I felt and I was not yet strong enough to enter the world of police and courts. In 1993, I did speak out publicly about the abuse and was met with a wall of victim blaming. Key's head of school denied they had any institutional responsibility. In 1997, I detailed my abuse to Anne Arundel County Police and specifically pointed out that it was common practice at Key, Yet no investigation was ever done. Police interviewed me again in 2018. In 2019, the Anne Arundel County State's Attorney's office interviewed me. Still no action. Despite having being raped multiple times by two teachers, they claim they are unsure those were felony crimes at the time.

Turned away, silenced, and shamed by one's school and law enforcement as we try to bring these abuses to light is the definition of institutional betrayal. Research now shows it magnifies the harm caused by sexual abuse. If institutions are causing real, measurable harm not only by allowing the abuse to occur but by silencing the victims, why shouldn't victims be empowered with access to justice so they may hold them accountable for that harm?

For these reasons, I respectfully urge a favorable committee report and passage of Senate Bill 686 without amendments.