

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: Kurt William Rupprecht

DATE: February 23, 2023

Chairman Smith and Committee, thank you for this opportunity to speak our pain and our truth.

My name is Kurt Rupprecht of Forest Hill, MD. I am a Survivor of childhood sexual abuse in support of SB686 and HB1, the Child Victims Act.

I was born in 1970 and raised in Salisbury, MD. My Dad was a Maryland State Trooper, Mom a Registered Nurse. When Dad was assigned to the Salisbury Barracks, they were people suddenly far away from their homes in east Baltimore County. The foundation of their new lives was the Catholic Church. I grew up attending Mass weekly, volunteering with the Little Sisters of the Poor, and receiving my childhood sacraments at St. Francis de Sales parish in Salisbury. I dearly wanted to make my parents proud while embracing my Catholic faith.

In 1978 a charismatic young Seminarian named Joseph McGovern came to St. Francis. He endeared himself to my family. In January 1979 he was Ordained, and as the Church teaches, he became the human form of Jesus and God on Earth with their transformational powers of the Sacraments. Father Joe soon made me his special helper to assist him after the Folk Mass. He would take me into the Sacristy for the honor to stand arms out holding his holy vestments. He would then open his pants exposing himself to me. After convincing me to keep our special secret, I was later promoted to also being hugged and pressed against his genitals, while still holding his vestments. Right now, I can still see, smell, and feel the heavy polyester on my arms; as I tried not to look at him and focus on my important Catholic duties.

The abuse continued, finally culminating in December 1979, when one Sunday afternoon Father Joe took me to McDonalds for a Star Trek the movie Happy Meal.

I was thrilled! Afterward he drove me to a secluded location, slide his left hand down my pants and began to molest me. I finally said No, begging him to stop. That feeble resistance of a skinny 9 year old boy ignited a manic violent response. He began to squeeze my genitals until it felt they would smash and burst. He clamped his right hand over my throat and choked me. Screaming into my face that I had betrayed him and God, screaming 'God wants you Dead'! Frozen, terrified, fighting for breath, I felt I was about to die. That's when my brain shut down to protect me the only way it could, and repressed those details for decades. However, that raging Monster imbedded itself into my psychosis permanently. The destructive impact of the PTSD I suffered manifested into my thoughts, emotions, and behaviors.

I have suffered devastating mental and physical damages from my abuse for 44 years. I will suffer from them the rest of my life, as will my wife and children. There is no true healing from this type of childhood trauma, only survival. Every day is a choice: to take the combination of medications I require to remain stable, to see my counselor and doctor, to go to work to provide for my family, to not make my parents bury their only child. Or the choice to give up and make it the day I end my own life, because that is the only way to finally kill the Monster that lives inside me.

Please also understand the larger picture of how I came to be abused as a child of the Diocese of Wilmington who lived in Maryland. In the Diocese of Wilmington 85% of their Parishes had Predator Priests assigned during the 1960s through 1990s. We know this because of the 2007 Delaware Statute of Limitations Reform Law and look back window for Survivors. The legal Discovery empowered by the look back window released the documentation proving the Diocese of Wilmington protected their predator priests, and their explicit strategy to avoid exposure in Delaware by concentrating their predators within the Maryland parishes. The Parishes in Delaware contained 79% of the Diocese members and averaged 2.4 predator priest assignments per Parish. Maryland contained only 21% of the Diocese members while the Parish average was 7 predator priest assignments. Therefore, within the Wilmington Diocese, catholic children on the Eastern Shore of Maryland were 11 times more likely to be exposed to a predator priest than catholic children in Delaware.

There are 59 parishes in the Wilmington Diocese. The one by far with the highest number of predator priests' assignments was St. Francis de Sales in Salisbury. Two

of its' Pastors, Fathers Lind and Irwin, were themselves abusers and considered 'predator mentors' to younger abusive priests. Father Irwin was my abuser's mentor when Joe McGovern arrived as a seminarian. Father Joe would be transferred among five different parishes over the next six years. Sexually abusing young boys in every location. He even fought back against his own Bishops and Vicar General when they attempted to remove him from ministry. Screaming and raging at them how they did not understand the sanctity of his Man-Boy relationships.

Today Father Joe is alive and living on his Diocesan paid benefits. My parents are alive and able to corroborate the times and places of my sexual abuse. Sexual abuse which for me occurred 6 miles on the wrong side of the Mason Dixon line. It occurred in Maryland, where today even the Attorney General's Catholic Church Investigation, which I participated, is not allowed to bring to light the abuses suffered across this state. It occurred in Maryland, where my Justice delayed is truly Justice denied.

Finally, please remember The Child Victims Act is for all our citizens; Survivors of the past, as well as our Children Today and Tomorrow. I realize my experiences are with the one entity that consistently fights this legislation. However, **no** single institution of any kind deserves the power to deny Justice to those of us who are broken and Protection to our children when they are vulnerable.

Please hear us. I implore you to support SB686.