

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: Jean Hargadon Wehner

DATE: February 23, 2023

My name is Jean Hargadon Wehner and I strongly support bill SB 686. I was sexually abused and raped at Archbishop Keough High school, between the years of 1967 & 1971, by Father Joseph Maskell and others. Accomplices to these crimes are the institutions that betrayed their trusting faith communities by allowing their children to be left in harm's way. The trauma I endured during those years was so great, that in order to survive, I had to sever from that young victim and bury her deep within my subconscious. This is called dissociative amnesia.

In the spring of 1992, at the age of 38, I felt as if a 14-year-old girl sat down next to me and said, "I have something to tell you." I then began "throwing up memories". These repressed memories, which have continued surfacing to this day, may be triggered by a photo, a smell or a place. These disgustingly detailed images and thoughts do not present themselves in a chronological fashion. As the memory unfolds, I feel on multiple levels that I am going through that horrible experience for the first time.

While my world was shattering, I met with church representatives and after a few meetings I gave 2 formal statements pertaining to the abuse. Following the first one, Joseph Maskell, who was in his fifties, was removed from his parish and sent for evaluation.

In 1994 I agreed to file a civil suit against Joseph Maskell, the Archdiocese of Baltimore and The School Sisters of Notre Dame with Teresa Lancaster. I said yes, not to bankrupt the Catholic church, but because the archdiocese returned Maskell to work as a pastor to a neighboring parish. I was upset that he was around kids, and the thought that he was in the area and knew that I had told the "secret" terrified me. I had visions of him shooting me and my family with the gun he threatened me with at Keough.

Also, the statute of limitations in 1971, which we were bound by, stated we had to report abuse within three years of it ending. **I couldn't believe I was expected to report something I did not remember, so I thought I was still in my three-year time frame, since I had no memory of any of this abuse until 1992.**

We lost the case in 1995 due to the court's decision that repressed memories were not scientifically proven, keeping the statute of limitations intact. This decision undermined my, and many others', health progress for years. As victims we need to know that perpetrators will be held accountable when found out. Because the science behind the effects trauma has on the brain has grown, allowing dissociative amnesia to be more understood and accepted, I think having a statute of limitations imposed on victims of childhood sexual abuse is not fair to the victims, while it benefits the perpetrators.

I strongly urge each of you to vote to pass bill # SB 686.

Thank you!