

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 686
THE CHILD VICTIMS ACT
Civil Actions – Child Sexual Abuse – Definitions, Damages, and Statute of Limitations
(The Child Victims Act of 2023)
****SUPPORT****

TO: Hon. William C. Smith, Chair, and members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

FROM: Frank Schindler

DATE: February 23, 2023

My name is Frank Schindler, and I am a member of the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests (SNAP). I strongly support SB 686 as it will send a strong message to all survivors and their abusers that the gross violation of the basic civil right of children not to be abused will no longer be tolerated in Maryland, no matter how powerful the source of that abuse.

In 1954 a 5-year-old boy climbed a dark staircase and entered a room to start kindergarten. A short time later, a nun, a trusted figure in a Catholic school, escorted this boy into a room where a Catholic priest was waiting. The boy had been told a priest is a representative of God on earth, whose actions were not to be questioned, and who could never do anything wrong, & the boy believed this. Shortly thereafter the boy was subjected by this priest to repeated and painful sexual abuse which occurred 2 to 3 times a week over a period of approximately 5 months. The basic right of a powerless 5-year-old child not to be abused was violated over and over for the gratification of a priest whose powerful position was unquestioned. I was that 5-year-old. I am now 73 years old. For close to 70 years and for whatever remains of my life, I will suffer the consequences of that abuse.

As a psychologist specializing in neurocognition and neuroscience I could describe for you the long-term dysregulation of neurochemical systems and of brain regions including the amygdala, hippocampus, and medial prefrontal cortex. I could describe the distortion of emotions, interpersonal relationships, and self-perception produced by such dysregulation. And how the dysregulation contributes to the reality that most survivors only fully recall their abuse years after it occurs. Neurobiologically, the experience of trauma bears no “time stamp”, unlike other memories. But this information is well-established, well-known, and easily accessible to any of you. It is sufficient to say that my life, and the lives of others subjected to sexual abuse and trauma are never the same – biologically, emotionally, or socially. The effects are pervasive and life-long.

Like so many others I’ve struggled with depression, shame, self-loathing, and persistent, often very powerful, thoughts of suicide. I have been lucky enough to have received support from my wife, from family, and from other survivors and advocates. Otherwise, I am quite sure I would not be here.

For too long, the Roman Catholic Church has fostered the systematic, institutionalized sexual abuse of children and has enabled priests, bishops, and others to avoid accountability for criminal actions. This has been well-documented by the reports of States Attorneys General and other sources. The Catholic Church has persisted in its policy of using completely arbitrary time limits to silence the attempts of survivors to obtain justice. Despite countless opportunities to acknowledge their history and finally take responsibility for their reprehensible behavior, this morally bankrupt institution has persisted in re-traumatizing survivors through their lies and cover-ups.

The Child Victims Act will enhance the basic right of children not to be abused for the pleasure and power of those entrusted with their care. It will finally enable survivors and their supporters to hold those who perpetrate and are complicit in those atrocities accountable for their actions. I consider this both a moral and a civil rights issue. Passage of this legislation will send a strong message to all survivors and to their abusers that this gross violation of the basic right of children not to be abused will no longer be tolerated in Maryland, no matter how powerful the source of that abuse.

For those reasons, I respectfully urge a favorable report on SB 686.