

Teresa F Lancaster
Testimony for SB686 - Child Victims Act of 2023

GOOD AFTERNOON MEMBERS OF COMMITTEE, my name is Teresa Lancaster. I am an Attorney, survivor, activist, and advocate for victims of childhood sexual abuse. I was abused 1970-72 at Archbishop Keough High School by the counselor there, Father A. Joseph Maskell.

You may know me from The Keepers documentary. This 7-part docuseries exposed the sex abuse ring at Keough run by Father Maskell and how one brave nun, Sister Cathy, ended up brutally murdered after trying to help the girls being abused.

I was unable to come forward about my abuse in the 1970's because Maskell convinced me I would not be believed, and he threatened me with his gun. I FEARED FOR MY LIFE.

This is common among survivors. Why? The severe nature of the trauma endured coupled with the often-high social position of the abusers are factors that prevent survivors from coming forward earlier. Other factors are depression & substance abuse. The support group RAINN reports that 20% of survivors fear retaliation if they come forward. Studies show the average age to come forward is 52. Reasons for the delay in reporting the abuse are specific to the individual.

I struggled with the fact that my abuser was someone I trusted. I was raised in the strict Catholic Religion and was taught that the priests were literally God on earth. Additionally, my abuser had the respect of the entire community.

Father Maskell was very intelligent, had a degree in psychology, and used his skills to groom both victims and their parents. He had total control of his victims. As a counselor at Keough, he had free reign over the girls at Keough. He preyed on the vulnerable.

Maskell filled positions of power as a police chaplain as well as a military chaplain for young recruits. He always had access to young victims. Through my work helping other survivors, I learned that Maskell abused kids as young as 3 years of age.

When Jean Wehner and I came forward and started our civil lawsuit in 1993 as Jane Doe and Jane Roe, we quickly realized that the institution we held our trust in would again betray us. The Catholic Church has a long history of hiding their pedophile priests and shipping them from parish to parish. Betrayal of a trusted institution adds another difficult layer onto the trauma of abuse.

Cardinal Keeler knew our case was credible but used the Statute of Limitations (SOL) to make our case go away. **I respectfully ask you to pass SB686, Child Victims Act of 2023.**

SB686 will: 1. Provide a path to justice for victims ready to come forward. 2. Help Identify Hidden Predators, and 3. Disclose facts of the sex abuse epidemic to the public. Thank you.