

My name is Mary Corzine, and I am here to provide testimony as a survivor of childhood sexual abuse in support of HB 686

When I found the courage to come forward and tell a teacher, multiple priests, and a therapist the response was devastating.

I was told:

He is sick- it's not his fault.

You'll feel better when you forgive him.

Vengeance belongs to God alone. This last one is a common offering to victims and is particularly painful to me.

At least you weren't raped.

Is it any wonder that victims don't come forward for decades when this is the response they receive?

I tried several times to tell my parents but became overwhelmed with panic, worrying about what would happen next. I didn't know the words to describe what was happening. I was in fifth grade when I was instructed to sit on the abuser's lap in a darkened room in an empty house on school property. I thought he had a stick in his pocket -repeatedly poking at me. I was instructed to wrap my arms around his neck tightly while he "talked" to me. When it was over I flew outside red-faced and crying and went to the school bathroom, my uniform was wet with a substance unidentifiable to me. I wiped it off and returned to class feeling numb and overwrought at the same time.

This happened several times in the same house and also in the boiler room in the school where I was placed across the top of a child-sized desk hidden in the back. I told a teacher about the abuse, and she never told my parents. My abuser was then moved to a different parish. Later, in 1986 I learned an 8th grade boy attempted suicide after being abused by the same man. The priest, now laicized at his request, was working as a basketball coach in the same archdiocese. He later pleaded guilty to four counts of sodomizing a minor, admitting to sexually abusing six other boys more than 50 times in the previous six years.

A plea deal granted him immunity from prosecution for abusing the other six boys. He served 9 months and is not on the Maryland Sex Offenders registry. It's heartbreaking to me that a person can commit repeated, constant and calculated pedophilia in Maryland and get away with it. He is a perfect example of how abusers will continue to abuse unless they are stopped. This bill will help to expose abusers like him, and protect children in the future.

Today, I am here for them as well as myself. When victims come forward perpetrators are exposed and children are safer. Predators depend on the statute of limitations to be able to continue to practice their compulsions. Institutions further protect abusers when they consistently demonstrate a lack of courage by protecting their institutions rather than its victims. There is hope for survivors but without resources trauma can seem insurmountable.

Thank you and please support HB 686.