



**Maryland Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
Testimony of Rights4Girls
In Support of
SB 389**

February 04, 2024

Thank you, Chairman Smith and Members of the Committee for the opportunity to provide testimony on SB 389. And thank you Senator Folden for leading such an important bill.

Rights4Girls is a national human rights organization dedicated to ending gender-based violence against young women and girls in the United States. Based in Washington, D.C., we work at the intersection of race, gender, and violence against women and girls at the federal, state, and local levels. Over the past several years, we have been actively involved in the passage of multiple federal and state laws aimed at reforming systems to improve our response to vulnerable girls and providing increased funding and services to survivors of sexual violence. We implore the committee to support SB 389.

In April of 2024, Chrystul Kizer was sentenced to 11 years in a Wisconsin state prison.

Chrystul Kizer met Randall Volar when she was 16. Volar sexually abused her multiple times, and had filmed his abuse of her.¹ When he wasn't abusing her, he was trafficking her to other men for sex.²

After a year of repeated abuse, Chrystul went to Volar's home with a gun in her purse her boyfriend had given her for protection.³ While Chrystul was there, Volar drugged her and put on a movie. As Volar began initiating abuse, Chrystul refused. Volar retaliated by pinning her, and Kizer grabbed her gun and shot him. She then set his body on fire and fled his car.⁴

During her trial, Kizer stated, "I just thought that I didn't want to do that stuff anymore because I was trying to change."⁵

Further investigation by the Washington Post found that authorities had evidence, including video, that Volar was abusing about a dozen girls including Kizer - all of whom appeared to be underage.⁶ Four

¹ Honderich, H. *Milwaukee Woman Jailed for 11 Years for Killing Her Abuser*. BBC. (2024, Aug. 19)

² Id.

³ Madani, D. *Chrystul Kizer Sentenced to 11 Years in Prison for Killing Man She Said Sexually Trafficked Her as a Teen*. NBC News. (2024, Aug. 19)

⁴ Id.

⁵ Id.

⁶ Honderich, H. *Milwaukee Woman Jailed for 11 Years for Killing Her Abuser*. BBC. (2024, Aug. 19)



months before Volar died, police arrested him on charges of sexual assault but released him the same day.⁷

Prosecutors and Kenosha District Attorney Michael D. Graveley accused Kizer of premeditated murder, alleging she planned to steal Volar's BMW.⁸ Following Chrystul's sentencing, D.A. Graveley stated he was satisfied as he was seeking for "people who are related to Mr. Volar and the people who care about Chrystul Kizer to all get closure at this point."⁹ For those who care about the child sex trafficker and those who care about the sexually abused child to all get closure. We have called this sort of thinking "justice."

Chrystul is just one of many child sex crime survivors who resorted to violence as a means to escape or protect themselves against their adult abusers, and are then criminalized and pushed into the adult system for acts of self-defense or attempts to escape their abusers.¹⁰ Many girls, and especially girls of color, have faced decades to life in adult prison in these cases.¹¹

Members of the committee, we ask you to remember the point of the justice system, though we sometimes fail to achieve it: appropriate consequence and eventual rehabilitation.

Dr. Kathleen Heide is currently a professor of Criminology at the University of South Florida, but her expertise lies in juvenile homicide.¹² With more than 25 years of experience, 4 books, 120 publications written, and countless consultancies in the areas of adolescent homicide and juvenile justice.¹³ When asked what she learned about juveniles who commit homicide she stated:

Heide: There are three takeaways from my work. First, murders don't just happen...Most juvenile homicide offenders have had many adverse childhood events that put them at risk for behaving maladaptively. Second, murders and violence by juveniles can be reduced by increasing developmental assets or protective factors... Kindness goes a long way, particularly with respect to young people whose lives are filled with child maltreatment, poverty and myriad forms of trauma. Third, juveniles who act out are **not the equivalent of adults who behave badly**. With rare exceptions, they have the capacity to change. If given time to mature and provided with appropriate treatment and interventions, some juvenile homicide offenders, perhaps, many, may be able to be safely released into society in the future.¹⁴

⁷ Id.

⁸ Madani, D. *Chrystul Kizer Sentenced to 11 Years in Prison for Killing Man She Said Sexually Trafficked Her as a Teen*. NBC News. (2024, Aug. 19)

⁹ Id.

¹⁰ Yasmin Vafa & Rebecca Epstein, *Criminalized Survivors: Today's Abuse to Prison Pipeline for Girls* (2023), p.8.

¹¹ Id, p.11.

¹² USF Department of Criminology, College of Behavioral and Community Sciences. *Faculty and Staff*

¹³ Id.

¹⁴ *Why Kids Kill: How A Curiosity About the Minds of Young Murderers Drive 43 Years of Research and Education*. (2024, Jul. 11)



When you are 15, you are shortsighted. You felt like the world was ending if you were getting bullied. Like there was no way life would ever get better; like the world was going to end. And many teenagers, as a result, commit suicide.

These kids are being abused, their bodies are being entered into and violated, their brain chemistry is changing to accommodate the trauma. And for many, there really is no way out.

To punish them as if there was any other way, is cruel, inhumane, and willfully ignorant.

We ask that you consider SB 389 for what it is: a bill that will help the justice system remember they are looking at a child; a child who experienced abuse beyond comprehension. And we ask that you support its passage.

Thank you for your time and consideration.