



BILL NO: SB274

TITLE: Criminal Procedure – Child Victims – Testimony in Child Abuse Cases

COMMITTEE: Judicial Proceedings

HEARING DATE: January 30th, 2025

POSITION: FAVORABLE

ABOUT: TurnAround, Inc. was founded in 1978 and serves as the designated rape crisis center for Baltimore City and Baltimore County. TurnAround offers comprehensive services, including legal support, counseling, case management, and emergency shelter to those who have endured intimate partner violence, sexual violence, and human trafficking in Baltimore City, Baltimore County, and Howard County.

This bill speaks to what I have heard a lot of survivors say over my fifteen years as a former state prosecutor and working in the field of antitrafficking and child abuse. It is professed by many victims, who were children when they went through the criminal justice system but are now adults, that the criminal justice system is actually more traumatizing than the assaults that happened against them.

Imagine you are in a meeting, or a lecture hall, or another room full of people you do not know. As the old lawyer adage goes, look to the right and left of you – but instead of the teacher saying that one of you will fail law school, the teacher is asking you to describe to them the most horrific sexual experience you have ever had. Even with the most wonderful experience you have ever had, you are probably not likely to do that. Imagine, then, doing that in front of the person who committed that heinous crime against you, and add power and control into that dynamic, and the fact that you are a child. This person has exerted that power and control over you.

The reality is that these kids are not traumatized just by the system; they are also traumatized by this assault and this person, and we have to make sure that we are recognizing that trauma. This bill provides a way to do that which protects both the criminal defendant and the young person involved. At TurnAround, in 2023, we had three survivors who were under the age of eight years old. This happens, and with far too great a frequency. In discussion with the Legislative Committee of the Maryland Human Trafficking Task Force, one of the former prosecutors described seeing a child testify in front of their abuser as “literally watching someone face their monster.”

Based on that, **TurnAround, Inc. is asking for a favorable report for SB274.**