



## **Working to end sexual violence in Maryland**

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### **Testimony Regarding House Bill 1378 Lisae C. Jordan, Executive Director & Counsel March 11, 2025**

The Maryland Coalition Against Sexual Assault (MCASA) is a non-profit membership organization that includes the State's seventeen rape crisis centers, law enforcement, mental health and health care providers, attorneys, educators, survivors of sexual violence and other concerned individuals. MCASA includes the Sexual Assault Legal Institute (SALI), a statewide legal services provider for survivors of sexual assault. MCASA represents the unified voice and combined energy of all of its members working to eliminate sexual violence.

#### **House Bill 1378 – Limiting Claims Against the State - Civil Child Sexual Abuse Cases**

This bill would prevent survivors of child sexual abuse from filing claims against the State of Maryland after January 2026 if the claim would have been time barred prior to October 1, 2023.

**The Maryland Coalition Against Sexual Assault fully supports the rights of survivors to have meaningful remedies for abuse.** HB1378 proposes to limit these rights and create a new time limit for lawsuit. The financial burden on the state, the state's current fiscal crisis, and the very real possibility of diminishing resources for victims are all cited as the reasons for the limitation on civil lawsuits. MCASA recognizes the significant challenges the State faces, nonetheless, we have grave reservations of about cutting off survivors' ability to sue the State so quickly.

**The Committee should consider enacting alternative means of recovery for survivors who will not be able to file a private lawsuit if HB1378 is enacted, as well as for those who are not helped by the private bar now.** There are currently survivors who are not helped by private lawsuits. Efforts to help provide meaningful access to civil remedies for survivors of sexual abuse dragged on for decades. Over time, perpetrators died, witnesses' memories faded, and the likelihood of winning lawsuit disappeared for some survivors. Private attorneys take private cases in order to make money, and survivors with weak court cases do not find representation. Removing the statute of limitations for civil child sexual abuse suits did not help survivors who do not have viable lawsuits. House Bill 1378 would increase the number of survivors left in this situation.

**The State should create options for survivors who are not and will not be helped by civil lawsuits.** Options to support survivors could include establishing a fund to provide

reimbursement for healing therapies, increasing funding for advocacy, and other forms of support. At very least, Maryland should reject current efforts to cut victim services funding and instead ensure counseling and mental health services for survivors continue.

**Child sexual abuse causes devastating problems for many of its victims.** Child sexual abuse victims can suffer depression, aggression, somatic complaints, problems sleeping, eating disorders, regression, sexual acting out or promiscuity, seductive behaviors, self-mutilation, substance abuse, and suicide gestures and attempts. Long-term effects of child sexual abuse include post-traumatic stress disorder, difficulties forming relationships, early teenage sex with older men, prostitution, and poor self-esteem.

The difficulties caused by child sexual abuse have real costs: emotional and financial. Victims often require and benefit from counseling. Others incur medical costs or have difficulty maintaining employment or schooling as a direct result of the abuse. It is unfair to force the victim to bear the costs of the harm caused by a perpetrator of child sexual abuse just because they missed a new deadline.

**Limiting lawsuits against the state should not mean limiting resources for survivors. If the General Assembly decides to enact HB1378, we urge the State to protect and expand other supports for survivors.**