

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 722

Child Sexual Abuse Claims – Doctrine of Charitable Immunity- Abrogation

Abrogating the doctrine of charitable immunity as a defense in child sexual abuse claims

****SUPPORT****

TO: Hon. Sandy J. Barlett, Chair and members of the House Judiciary Committee

FROM: Teresa F Lancaster

DATE: February 19, 2026

My name is Teresa Lancaster, and I am an attorney, survivor, activist, and advocate. I strongly support HB 722, which aims to prevent charitable organizations from evading liability for sexual abuse claims involving minors.

The charitable immunity doctrine, which historically protected charities from lawsuits, undermines the hard-won rights of survivors who continue to bear the lasting impact of childhood sexual abuse. It is essential that institutions involved, including the church, are held accountable for their actions.

The charitable immunity doctrine is a legal principle rooted in the idea that charities serve the public good, providing broad protection against liability. While this may have seemed like a good policy in the past, in practice, Maryland has become a safe haven for organizations that fail to take sexual misconduct seriously. The church, in particular, has repeatedly enabled predators and now seeks to hide behind this outdated doctrine.

Over time, the influence of the doctrine has waned as it has been challenged, limited, and, in many states, abolished entirely. Maryland remains one of only nine states where this policy still applies, alongside Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Utah, and others.

Please do not allow the Child Victims Act—which empowers survivors to seek justice—to be dismantled. We have fought tirelessly to reach this point and too many survivors have been lost along the way—many of whom are unable to confront the trauma of their abuse.

I am one of those survivors. At just 16 years old, I was sexually abused by Father Maskell, a counselor priest at Archbishop Keough High School. I endured unimaginable horrors in his office, at his rectory, and in his car—acts that no child should ever experience.

Furthermore, the church enabled Maskell, knowing he was a predator before sending him to Keough. This fact was confirmed in the documentary **The Keepers**—which the church initially claimed was false—and was ultimately proven in the Attorney General’s report released in Spring 2023.

The church has a long history of enabling predators and using any means necessary to avoid accountability. Maryland's General Assembly effectively abolished the archaic charitable immunity doctrine when it enacted the Child Victims Act, giving survivors the opportunity to seek justice.

Many survivors of childhood sexual abuse are still unable to receive fair compensation for the harm they have endured. I respectfully ask for a favorable ruling on HB 722 to help ensure justice and accountability for all survivors.