



CHILDREN'S
JUSTICE
CAMPAIGN

AN INITIATIVE OF ENOUGH ABUSE

+617-742-8555
info@enoughabuse.org
112 Water Street, Suite 502
Boston, Massachusetts 02109

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 8078

House Committee on Judiciary

March 12, 2026

POSITION: FAVORABLE

Submitted by: Children's Justice Campaign at Enough Abuse

Dear Chairwoman McEntee and esteemed members of the Committee:

The Children's Justice Campaign at Enough Abuse submits this testimony in **strong support of H 8078**, which would authorize grand juries to issue reports on matters of public concern, subject to judicial review and due process protections. This legislation is of critical importance to child protection because grand jury reports have been among the most powerful tools in the nation for exposing institutional child sexual abuse and catalyzing the legislative reforms that protect children today.

I. Grand Jury Reports Have Been the Most Effective Tool for Exposing Institutional Child Sexual Abuse

The national reckoning with institutional child sexual abuse—the movement that has led more than thirty states and territories to enact SOL reform and transformed how American institutions approach child safety—was made possible, in large measure, by grand jury reports.

The 2018 Pennsylvania Grand Jury Report is the most consequential example. That two-year investigation documented abuse by more than 300 priests against more than 1,000 children across six dioceses over seventy years.ⁱ The Report did not merely catalog individual acts of abuse, it exposed the institutional mechanisms of concealment: transferring accused priests to new parishes, the use of euphemistic internal language to minimize abuse, the deployment of institutional resources to discredit victims, and the systematic prioritization of institutional reputation over child safety.ⁱⁱ The report transformed public understanding of institutional abuse and directly catalyzed SOL reform in Pennsylvania and across the nation.ⁱⁱⁱ

The Maryland Attorney General's Report on the Archdiocese of Baltimore (2023) had the same effect, documenting decades of “pervasive and persistent” abuse and “a history of repeated dismissal or cover up.”^{iv} That report was the direct catalyst for Maryland's Child Victims Act of 2023, one of the most comprehensive child protection statutes in the nation— which eliminated all SOLs for child sexual abuse claims and applied retroactively to revive previously time-barred actions.^v



Illinois, New Jersey, New York, and other states have conducted similar investigations, and in every case the resulting reports served as the foundation for legislative reform and institutional accountability.^{vi}

II. H 8078 Balances Transparency with Robust Due Process Protections

H 8078 does not create unchecked power. It establishes a carefully structured framework that balances transparency with fairness. At the threshold, no report may be submitted without the concurrence of twelve or more jurors—a supermajority that guards against partisan or unsubstantiated findings. Even then, the presiding justice must independently review the report and grand jury minutes before accepting it as a public record. The court must satisfy itself that the report is based on facts revealed during the investigation and supported by a preponderance of the evidence.

The bill's protections for named individuals are equally robust. Every person whose conduct is the subject of the report must be afforded a reasonable opportunity to testify before the grand jury prior to filing. Named individuals then receive written notice and thirty days to review the report and submit objections, followed by an additional thirty days to appeal the court's acceptance order.

The bill also ensures that transparency does not compromise other proceedings. The court must redact privileged material, information identifying confidential informants, and anything that could prejudice a pending criminal matter, and must seal the entire report if necessary to protect a pending case. These protections are consistent with the frameworks Pennsylvania and New York have employed, striking the appropriate balance between the public's right to know and the rights of individuals named in the proceedings.^{vii}

III. Without Grand Jury Reporting Authority, Institutional Abuse Remains Hidden

The criminal justice system prosecutes individuals; it does not expose institutional patterns. A grand jury investigating institutional abuse may find that prosecutions are barred by the SOL, that key perpetrators are deceased, or that the evidence, while clearly establishing institutional failure, does not meet the beyond-a-reasonable-doubt standard required for criminal conviction.^{viii}. Without reporting authority, those findings die in the grand jury room. The public never learns what the institution knew or what systemic failures allowed abuse to continue.

Grand jury reports fill this gap. They allow the public to learn the truth even when criminal prosecution is not possible, and they create the public record upon which legislative reform is built. The Pennsylvania experience is proof. Before the 2018 report, Pennsylvania had some of the weakest child protection laws in the nation. Within two years of the report's publication, the legislature enacted comprehensive SOL reform.^{ix}. Maryland's experience is identical; the Attorney General's Report was released in April 2023, and the CVA was signed into law the same month.^x



Conclusion

The question is not whether institutional failures have occurred in Rhode Island. The question is whether Rhode Island has the tools to uncover them. H 8078 provides that tool by empowering the grand jury to fulfill its historic function as a shield between the citizen and the government, and, in this context, between the child and the institution.^{xi} Therefore, we urge the Committee to report H 8078 favorably.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have questions regarding this legislation or if we can be of assistance in any other way.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathryn Robb, Esq.
National Director
Children's Justice Campaign at Enough Abuse

Jessica Schidlow, Esq.
Senior Policy Analyst & Legislative Counsel
Children's Justice Campaign at Enough Abuse

ⁱ 40th Statewide Investigating Grand Jury, Report I, at 1–12 (Pa. 2018).

ⁱⁱ *Id.* at 2–6 (describing the “circle of secrecy” employed by diocesan officials).

ⁱⁱⁱ See 2019 Pa. Laws, Act 87 (amending 42 Pa. Cons. Stat. Ann. § 5533 to extend the civil SOL for child sexual abuse); 2024 Pa. Const. Amend. (constitutional amendment authorizing a two-year revival window, approved by voters in November 2024).

^{iv} Md. Att’y Gen., Report of the Independent Investigation of Child Sexual Abuse in the Archdiocese of Baltimore 5 (Apr. 2023) (hereinafter MD AG Report).

^v Child Victims Act of 2023, 2023 Md. Laws ch. 5 (codified as amended at Md. Code Ann., Cts. & Jud. Proc. § 5-117 (LexisNexis Supp. 2025)).

^{vi} See Ill. Att’y Gen., Report on the Investigation of Catholic Dioceses in Illinois (2023); N.Y. Suffolk Cnty. Grand Jury, Report on the Sexual Abuse of Children by Members of the Clergy (2003); see also Australian Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, Final Report (2017) (demonstrating the global impact of investigative transparency on institutional reform).

^{vii} See, e.g., 42 Pa. Cons. Stat. Ann. § 4548 (West 2024) (Pennsylvania’s investigating grand jury reporting statute, which served as the vehicle for the 2018 Grand Jury Report); N.Y. Crim. Proc. Law § 190.85 (McKinney 2024) (authorizing grand jury reports concerning misconduct by public servants).

^{viii} See 40th Statewide Investigating Grand Jury, *supra* note 1, at 1 (noting that many of the perpetrators identified in the investigation were deceased or beyond the reach of criminal prosecution, making the grand jury report the sole mechanism for public disclosure).

^{ix} 2019 Pa. Laws, Act 87.

^x See MD AG Report, *supra* note 6; 2023 Md. Laws ch. 5.



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^{xi} See *United States v. Calandra*, 414 U.S. 338, 343 (1974) (describing the grand jury as “a protector of citizens against arbitrary and oppressive governmental action”); *Wood v. Georgia*, 370 U.S. 375, 390 (1962) (same).