



HB1122 Criminal Procedure – Out of Court Statements – Child and Vulnerable Adult Victims  
House Judiciary Committee – March 4, 2021  
Testimony of Joyce Lombardi, Director of Government Relations and Legal Services  
Position: **SUPPORT**

---

Center for Hope (CFH) writes in support of HB1036 which would help the court to admit into evidence in criminal cases out of court statements made by a child victim or a vulnerable adult victim. The bill helps admit into evidence statements made to trained forensic interviewers and helps eliminate the trauma of repeated questioning by different interviewers. It would extend current law to cover very serious neglect cases for children, and to cover interviews of vulnerable adults.

Center for Hope, a subsidiary of LifeBridge Health, helps clients heal from acute violence such as child abuse, domestic violence, street violence and elder abuse through integrated, evidence-based programs that extend beyond hospital walls. Center for Hope provides trauma-informed crisis intervention, forensic interviews, medical exams, mental health, wraparound case management, family advocacy and workforce development services. Center for Hope now includes the Baltimore Child Abuse Center, one of the state's oldest and largest children's advocacy centers. Children's advocacy centers engage multidisciplinary teams of experts to respond to allegations of child abuse. Md. Cts and Jud Proc §11-928. Trained forensic interviewers are part of that team; they ask children child abuse, including sexual abuse, and serious neglect cases and are trained to ask neutral open-ended questions to elicit narrative responses in the victim's own words.

Center for Hope Elder Justice Program was created to provide an evidence-based approach to the growing -- but often overlooked -- problem of serious harm caused to older and vulnerable adults by family, caregivers and other trusted adults. The project convenes a multi-disciplinary team of experts, including forensic interviewers, law enforcement, medical and mental health professionals to review cases to identify gaps in services and systemic improvements.

Under current Maryland's "tender years" exception to the hearsay rule, out of court statements made to, eg a forensic interviewer, may be admissible in court proceedings for certain child abuse cases. This bill would extend that law to include serious child neglect cases (such as medical neglect in which children face near-fatal consequences) and cases involving vulnerable adults. Vulnerable adults include elderly or mentally or physically challenged adults.

Under Maryland law, children and vulnerable adults still have to testify in court to allow defendants to confront them. This bill would help allows a victim's additional out of court statements, once deemed admissible, to also be allowed in court. Those out of court statements, which are elicited in trauma-informed manner and places, may help provide evidence that a frightened child or vulnerable adult cannot provide in a traumatic court setting.

We urge a favorable report on HB1122.

A LIFEBRIDGE HEALTH GROUP

# CENTER FOR HOPE

**Advancing hope, healing and resilience**



Joyce Lombardi, Director of Government Relations  
Center for Hope

*LifeBridge Health is a regional health system comprising Sinai Hospital of Baltimore, Levindale Geriatric Center and Hospital in Baltimore; Northwest Hospital; Carroll Hospital and Grace Medical Center (formerly Bon Secours). At LifeBridge Health and Center for Hope, we are committed to convening national best practice and trauma experts to respond to violence, abuse and exploitation of our area's most vulnerable populations.*