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**TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION TO HOUSE BILL 285**

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**DOROTHY J. LENNIG, LEGAL CLINIC DIRECTOR**

House of Ruth is a non-profit organization providing shelter, counseling, and legal services to victims of domestic violence throughout the State of Maryland. House of Ruth has offices in Baltimore City, Baltimore County, Prince George's County, and Montgomery County. House Bill 285 sets out the professional, educational, and training requirements for court custody evaluators. **We urge the House Judiciary Committee to report unfavorably on House Bill 285.**

House of Ruth believes it is important that court custody evaluators are fully trained in many, but not all, of the areas outlined in the bill. A child custody evaluation is a process in which a mental health expert, often a psychologist or social worker, evaluates a family and makes a recommendation to the court for a custody/visitation/ or parenting plan that is in the child's best interests. It is extremely important for custody evaluators to be fully trained on the adverse childhood experiences, trauma, domestic violence, child abuse, and emotional abuse.

House of Ruth generally supports the intent of this bill but is concerned about moving the educational and training requirements for court custody evaluators from the Maryland Rules of Court to statute while leaving the rest of the conditions governing custody evaluators in the Maryland Rules. We believe that the Maryland Rules of Court are the correct place for all of the conditions governing custody evaluators as the Court needs to be able to adjust and amend these conditions as necessary to meet its needs and not wait for the next legislative session.

**House of Ruth urges the House Judiciary Committee to report unfavorably on House Bill 285.**