

My name is Dr. Stephanie Olarte. I'm a child and adolescent psychologist, and vice chair of the Maryland Psychological Association's legislative committee. It has been argued that no children were harmed during the 2020 incident in which several providers were fired from a CAC without having the opportunity to properly say goodbye to their patients, many of whom were in trauma treatment. Having worked with traumatized children in a similar clinical setting, I saw firsthand the distress that patients experienced when switching mental health providers even under very carefully planned circumstances. Proper termination of psychotherapy is a process that takes place over several weeks in order to minimize harm.

You may be wondering why this room isn't filled with families to tell you about the harm done to their children. The code of ethics outlined by the American Psychological Association guides psychologists' conduct with current and former patients. As psychologists dedicated to ethical practice, we must prioritize the privacy and confidentiality of our patients, even after they've left our care. We must also avoid interactions with our all patients that could be interpreted as exploitation. To ask former patients to testify in public would result in a breach of confidentiality, and potentially be an act of exploitation, if the patient complies in an effort to gain favor.

Sadly, even if former patients were to be made aware of this hearing, we suspect many would not be sufficiently empowered to testify. By sheer coincidence, I came into non-clinical contact with a parent whose child lost their therapist very suddenly at a CAC. This parent confided in me a borderline bizarre story of callous and careless handling of their child's treatment. They were given no emotional support as they learned that their therapist had terminated their employment and there would be no opportunity to say goodbye. Alarmingly, as this parent asked more questions, they were met with increasing intimidation. This happened with an English-speaking, college-educated, middle class family. If they were being met with intimidation to stop asking questions, we can all imagine the responses given to families who were not English-speakers, low literacy, or low socio-economic status.

While this family is currently abstaining from testimony due to fear of retaliation, they have permitted me to share their story anonymously in writing, which I have submitted as an attachment. I thank you for your support for House Bill 1100. For further information, I can be reached through MPA's legislative committee: [mpalegislativcommittee@gmail.com](mailto:mpalegislativcommittee@gmail.com)

Respectfully submitted,  
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Parent 1:

My children were working with incredible therapists at a child advocacy center in Maryland. We had searched long and hard for therapists who could provide the type of therapy (trauma focused cognitive behavioral therapy-TF-CBT) that they needed given their extensive trauma and abandonment histories. TF-CBT is phase oriented, meaning that there is an expectation it will last a certain number of sessions in order to be complete and effective. The predictability of this modality also supports children who have experienced trauma and benefit from structure and stability. My oldest was initially very resistant to therapy and guarded about opening up to anyone, but after weeks of meeting with his therapist, he began to trust her. He was moving into the trauma processing stage with his therapist, and was a few sessions into conversations about his trauma narrative.

After weeks of building rapport with his therapist and coping strategies, he was moving on to where deeper healing work occurs. I was also receiving parent support therapy from my kid's therapists which was proving very helpful for managing the big stressors we were facing as a family. Unfortunately, both of my children, who had already experienced so many losses in their short lives, lost their therapists without any notice on the same day. We were informed by a phone call from the child advocacy center that the therapists had "left the agency" and appointments scheduled today and moving forward were canceled. We were not provided any explanation or opportunity for closure or final goodbye sessions. This was shocking and confusing to our whole family because the therapists had been so caring, professional, and supportive to all of us. We knew that they would not have intentionally abandoned our kids like that, especially given that a major trauma our kids experienced was abandonment by former caregivers, but we were not given an explanation as to what happened.

This sudden and complete loss of therapists absolutely impacted our kids and me as a parent. We saw a resurgence in their trauma symptoms and they were confused and hurt by their therapists disappearing without explanation. It took weeks and countless phone calls to get a new therapist for our kids, but neither of my children or myself were able to build the trust needed with this new therapist and she also was not able to provide the same modality of therapy that had been working so well for my children.

I support this bill because there is no reason for children and families who have already experienced trauma to suffer the unexplained loss of a therapist without an opportunity for closure and certainty of timely and comparable follow up care. I am requesting this statement remain anonymous in order to protect the confidentiality of my children as it references their personal therapy and trauma. Additionally, intimidation tactics were previously used to silence me after our kids' therapists were terminated and as a result I fear retaliation for speaking publicly about this issue.

Parent 2:

Over the last few years my partner and I decided to become licensed foster parents. After going through the licensing training and doing our own extensive research, we felt comfortable with the rewards and challenges that came with having kids through foster care. We were excited to grow our family and provide a safe, supportive space.

One of the challenges we knew we would face is supporting our children's mental health after experiencing so much trauma and the disruption of changing caregivers. These traumas manifested in behavioral challenges, made daily life difficult and, as a result, our whole family suffered. So we knew ensuring our children had consistent, trauma-informed therapy would be essential to our family's healing. That's why we felt some relief to find out there was space at a child advocacy center for our children to receive trauma-informed therapy. After the initial intakes, we were hopeful that this experience would put us and our children on the path to recovery and stability.

Once in a regular rhythm of therapy with this center, our connections as a family grew and our tools to manage behavioral challenges felt stronger. Some of the behavioral challenges continued but others subsided. And regardless of the challenges, we felt like we had the tools and relationships with the children's therapists to make the necessary growth and changes happen to heal. The consistency and reliability of therapy and the therapeutic relationships was essential to this healing. For the kids who've experienced abandonment, in order to heal, they needed therapists who were predictable and reliable. That was part of the healing process; to have a helpful authority figure in their lives who they could rely on. It also brought a sense of relief to my partner and I to know we had reliable support for the challenges we knew we'd experience day in and day out and that we had professional partners who were invested in the long haul to see our family's healing happen. Our therapists were some of the most committed, good-hearted people we've ever met. We knew they truly cared.

Suddenly our appointments were canceled unexpectedly despite having been confirmed a few days prior. We were then informed that we would no longer be able to receive therapy from our therapists and that there would be no opportunity for closure through a meeting, phone call, or writing. This experience had a negative impact on our entire family. Again, our kids were experiencing abandonment by adults they put their trust in to help them grow, irritating already delicate attachment and trust styles. Once again, my partner and I felt isolated; having lost a significant portion of our support network. We asked for support with this and were denied closure.

The management of the organizations that care for our state's most vulnerable refused to provide any sense or semblance of closure to children who were hurt coming into care and now have been hurt again. My partner and I were once again alone in our support of the children and felt like asking for help only caused more

problems. The lack of care was disorientating. Our family continues to feel the repercussions of these events to this day. Our ability to believe these systems have the best interest of kids at heart has been severed. And that's a terrible shame.