

Written Testimony in Support of HB 405 Family Law – Child Custody Evaluators – Qualifications and Training

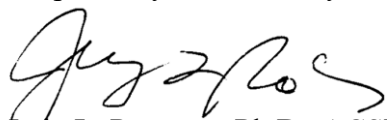
Thank you Chair Delegate Clippinger, Vice Chair Delegate Bartlett, and all the members of the Judiciary Committee for addressing this critical issue related to the protection of children who have experienced child abuse and are a party in a child custody or visitation proceeding. The University of Maryland, School of Social Work appreciates the opportunity to provide testimony in favor of HB 405, which establishes standards for custody evaluators approved by a court to perform a custody evaluation.

We support these high standards which recognizes the complexity of these court decisions and their impact on children and families. HB 405 identifies professionals, including social workers along with psychiatrists, psychologists, and counselors, to serve in this role for the courts when making these critical decisions. We can attest to the rigor of social work academic classes with multiple assignments and exams and two year-long field practicums which result in graduates with valuable practice experience and skills which are of service to the courts. Social Workers currently testify in various proceedings across the state, providing a valuable resource for our courts and Maryland's children and families.

HB 405 also recognizes the important of ensuring that all custody evaluators are prepared and knowledgeable by requiring extensive initial training and continuing education every 3 years in areas that focus solely on domestic and sexual violence, and child abuse. Our current Office of Continuing Professional Education currently offers an Advance Certificate in Forensic Social Work which focuses on the application of social work skills, knowledge, and principles within the context of the legal system. The program leading to the Certificate in Forensic Social Work is designed to provide the knowledge and skills required for social workers to practice effectively with the courts. While academically rigorous, the Advance Certificate in Forensic Social Work Program is designed to be easily accessible to the social worker who is working fulltime. This current program includes many of the subject areas identified in your bill, starting on page 4 line 10 through 28.

We at the School of Social Work have the capacity, expertise, and track record to provide the required training identified in HB 405. We stand ready to implement this legislative proposal if passed.

Respectfully submitted by



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