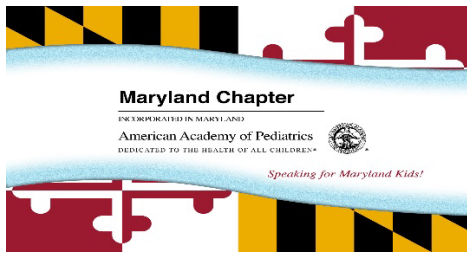


SB0222- Fam. Law - Child Custody Evaluators - Qual

Uploaded by: Christine Krone

Position: FAV



Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
January 20, 2026
Senate Bill 222 – *Family Law – Child Custody Evaluators – Qualifications*
POSITION: SUPPORT

The Maryland Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics (MDAAP) is a statewide association representing more than 1,100 pediatricians and allied pediatric and adolescent healthcare practitioners in the State and is a strong and established advocate promoting the health and safety of all the children we serve. On behalf of MDAAP, we submit this letter of support for Senate Bill 222.

MDAAP strongly **supports** *Senate Bill 222: Family Law – Child Custody Evaluators – Qualifications*. Senate Bill 222 was developed from recommendations of the *Workgroup to Study Child Custody Court Proceedings Involving Child Abuse or Domestic Violence Allegations* established by Senate Bill 567 (2019). The Workgroup consisted of subject-matter experts and advocates with vast experience in child-custody cases, child abuse, adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), and domestic violence. Over the course of 18 months, the Workgroup heard testimony from multiple experts as well as from parents who had gone through these contentious custody cases.

The Workgroup issued its 140-page report¹ in September 2020 adopting over 20 recommendations focused on better protecting children through such court proceedings. Testimony from experts and parents as well research before the Workgroup provided evidence that judges give extraordinary weight to custody evaluators and that custody evaluators, depending upon their training and expertise, may focus on and/or give weight to irrelevant factors.² Additionally, custody evaluators in Maryland are granted quasi-judicial immunity, shielding them from malpractice lawsuits.³ This makes holding evaluators accountable to specific educational, experiential, and training standards even more important.⁴

Ensuring proper qualifications, experience and training of custody evaluators – on childhood development, trauma, various types of child abuse and neglect and investigations, as well as the dynamics of domestic violence – is central to the very standard judges use to decide custody, i.e., “the best interest of the child”. Knowledge of critical science about early childhood brain development, how traumatic events impacts this development, state-investigatory processes and their limits, interpersonal dynamics that contribute to abusive behavior, the validity of and need for risk assessments, and preventive measures

¹http://dls.maryland.gov/pubs/prod/NoPblTabMtg/CmsnChdAbuseDomViol/FinalReport_Workgroup_to_Study_Child_Custody_Court_Proceedings_Involving_Child_Abuse_or_Domestic_Violence.pdf (hereinafter “Report”).

² Report at 35.

³ See *Williams v. Rappeport*, 699 F. Supp. 501, 508 (D. Md. 1988) (“Accordingly, [custody evaluators] Drs. Rappeport and Dvoskin are entitled to the protection of absolute immunity and the grant of summary judgment.”).

⁴ Timothy M. Tippins, *New York Law Journal*, “The Bar Won’t Raise Itself: The Case for Evaluation Standards,” July 8, 2013.

to mitigate abuse are all topics that are vital to the role of custody evaluator and they are the same topics that the Legislature previously mandated that judges receive.

Exposure to adverse childhood experiences such as child abuse and domestic violence increase a child's risk of long-term physical and mental health problems. These risks can be mitigated by the presence of supportive adults and protection from those that are abusive. Determining what is in the best interest of the child requires deep understanding of family dynamics, child development, adverse and positive childhood experiences, and other issues. Passage of this bill will ensure that children caught in the middle of custody disputes where abuse is alleged have high quality assessments by court evaluators and recommendations that place children in safe, stable and nurturing environments and allow them to flourish.

For these reasons a favorable report is requested.

For more information call:

Wendy Lane, MD, MPH

Co-Chair, MDAAP Maltreatment and Foster Care Committee

SB 222 -- Letter of Support to Senator Waldstreich

Uploaded by: Christopher Feldenzer

Position: FAV



Maryland's First
Nationally Accredited
Sheriff's Office



50 Maryland Avenue
Rockville, Md. 20850
240-777-7000
240-777-7148 Fax

SHERIFF MAXWELL C. UY

January 14, 2026

VIA E-MAIL: jeff.waldstreicher@senate.state.md.us

Honorable Jeffrey D. Waldstreicher
Vice-Chair, Judicial Proceedings Committee
Miller Senate Office Building, 2 East Wing
11 Bladen Street
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Re: Senate Bill 222 – Family Law – Child Custody Evaluators
– Qualifications

Dear Vice-Chair Waldstreicher:

The Montgomery County Sheriff's Office, which oversees the Montgomery County Family Justice Center (MCFJC), a co-location of services to support victims of domestic violence, strongly supports SB 222 – Family Law – Child Custody Evaluators – Qualifications. SB 222 would help advance the safety and well-being of children involved in child custody court proceedings involving child abuse or domestic violence by requiring that child custody evaluators have met certain licensing and educational qualifications before appointment as well as completed training approved by the Administrative Office of Courts to perform a custody evaluation in those child custody cases involving domestic violence or child abuse.

The MCFJC works with clients on a daily basis who desire a life free from fear, violence and uncertainty. Many of those clients have children who have witnessed such abuse or have been abused themselves. Unfortunately, perpetrators will oftentimes use custody as an opportunity to control and overpower the victim. Given these stakes, custody evaluators must have the critical educational backgrounds, skills and training to understand the dynamics of domestic violence and child abuse and must be able to make informed decisions to keep children safe from harm – both mentally and physically.

This legislation is all about putting the child first, and passage of SB 222 is long overdue. For the past six years, legislation has been introduced to require qualified and trained child custody evaluators be appointed in these most sensitive child custody cases involving domestic violence and child abuse. This legislation mirrors the Judiciary's updated Rule 9-205.3, and it is imperative that these vital child protections are passed into law without further delay. Codifying the qualification and training requirements for Maryland's child custody evaluators will help protect children in these most sensitive and potentially dangerous child custody cases involving allegations of child abuse and domestic violence.

I urge you to support SB 222. Thank you for your kind attention and consideration.

Sincerely,

Sheriff Maxwell C. Uy

cc: Senator Mary Beth Carozza
Tom Manion, Director, Montgomery County Family Justice Center

SB0222 CPMC FAV.pdf

Uploaded by: Diana Philip

Position: FAV

THE COALITION TO PROTECT MARYLAND'S CHILDREN

Our Mission: To combine and amplify the power of organizations and citizens working together to keep children safe from abuse and neglect. We strive to secure budgetary and public policy resources to make meaningful and measurable improvements in safety, permanence, and wellbeing.



SB0222 - Family Law – Child Custody Evaluators – Qualifications
Judicial Proceedings Committee
January 20, 2026, at 1:00p.m.

Position: SUPPORT

The Coalition to Protect Maryland's Children is a consortium of organizations and individuals formed in 1992 who are concerned about the care of Maryland's most vulnerable children and work together to promote meaningful child welfare reform. CPMC urges a favorable report on SB0222 - Family Law – Child Custody Evaluators – Qualifications.¹

SB0222 seeks to establish qualifications and training for professionals appointed or approved as child custody evaluators by the court, as well as eligibility to provide expert evidence in custody or visitation proceedings that include allegations of child maltreatment. Judges often rely on the assessments made by child custody evaluators in court proceedings. Ensuring proper qualifications, experience and training of custody evaluators – on childhood development, trauma, various types of child abuse and neglect and investigations, as well as the dynamics of domestic violence – is central to the very standard judges use to decide custody, i.e., “the best interest of the child”. The proposed training includes critical science about early childhood brain development, how traumatic events impact this development, state-investigatory processes and their limits, interpersonal dynamics that contribute to abusive behavior, the validity of and need for risk assessments, and preventive measures to mitigate abuse.

The bill stems from the recommendations of the Workgroup to Study Child Custody Court Proceedings Involving Child Abuse or Domestic Violence Allegations, which was established by SB0567 in the 2019 session. The Workgroup issued its 140-page report in September 2020 adopting over 20 recommendations.² As of October 1, 2025, Maryland Rules of Procedure adopted updated language regarding continuing education, certification, and knowledge topics including sexual abuse reflected in this bill (Rule 9-205.3).³

CPMC supports measures designed to improve the legal system's ability to appropriately and effectively intervene and prevent child abuse and neglect. It is for this reason that the Coalition to Protect Maryland's Children **urges a favorable report** on SB0222 - Family Law – Child Custody Evaluators – Qualifications.

¹ Members of CPMC represented by this written testimony include Center for Hope, Child Justice, Court Appointed Special Advocates (MD CASA), Court Appointed Special Advocates (Baltimore County), MD Chapter - American Academy of Pediatrics, Maryland Association of Resources for Families and Youth (MARFY), and National Association of Social Workers – MD.

²https://dls.maryland.gov/pubs/prod/NoPblTabMtg/CmsnChdAbuseDomViol/FinalReport_Workgroup_to_Study_Child_Custody_Court_Proceedings_Involving_Child_Abuse_or_Domestic_Violence.pdf

³<https://govt.westlaw.com/mdc/Document/N6D5648B1780B11F0B25FEA2E94F53678?contextData=%28sc.Default%29&transitionType=Default>

SB222 Evaluator Qualifications EKing-CJI Testimony

Uploaded by: Eileen King

Position: FAV



January 20, 2026

Re: Senate Bill 222 – Family Law – Child Custody Evaluators – Qualifications
SUPPORT

Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and Members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings
Committee:

My name is Eileen King. I am the Executive and Program Director of Child Justice, a Maryland nonprofit dedicated to protecting children in custody and protective order cases that involve child abuse and family violence.

January 2026 marks 30 years that I have been involved in supporting hundreds of protective parents and vulnerable children, many of whom experienced extreme trauma during these child court proceedings involving allegations of domestic abuse and child abuse.

Child Justice, Inc. strongly supports SB 222, legislation that ensures child custody evaluators meet certain professional qualifications and training with experience in the topics of domestic and family violence, child neglect and abuse including sexual abuse, and trauma and its impact on children and adults. Child Justice urges a favorable report on SB 222.

Over the years, the need for this child protection legislation has significantly grown as I reflect on my early years as an advocate for abuse survivors in 1995 working with the Washington, DC-based American Coalition for Abuse Awareness, and fast forwarding to the many difficult child custody cases handled by Child Justice. I can point to many cases where a trained and qualified child custody evaluator would have made all the difference in the safety and life of a child.

I recall a custody evaluator's report that the child's disclosure of sexual abuse by his stepfather should not be taken seriously. In another case, the custody evaluator dismissed the child's disclosure of her father allegedly ejaculating on her while she was in bed but not asleep. In his February 7, 2024 testimony, our Legal Director Paul Griffin referenced a current case with a photo and testified: "The custody evaluator – whose counsel for the victim was assured by the judge appointing her that she was well trained in domestic violence and child abuse – REFUSED to consider this photograph or you don't show photo – REFUSED TO CONSIDER a key photograph depicting horrific facial and body injuries to the

mother. She deemed it “irrelevant” because the domestic violence occurred before the custody order. She took this position despite it being contrary to the law in Maryland, the science associated with family violence and common sense.

Child Justice was honored to serve on the Workgroup to Study Child Custody Court Proceedings Involving Child Abuse or Domestic Violence Allegations in 2019 with a final report issued in 2020. The Workgroup issued a 140-page report in which it adopted 20 recommendations, including requiring training of judges and child custody evaluators in child custody cases involving child abuse or domestic violence.

We were encouraged when this Committee and the Maryland General Assembly approved Senate Bill 17 of 2022, sponsored by Senator Chris West, requiring training for judges and magistrates presiding over child custody cases involving child abuse or domestic violence, which was based on Recommendation #8 in the Workgroup’s Final Report.

SB 222 is based on Recommendation #14, which recognizes that judges give significant weight to the recommendations of child custody evaluators. Child Justice was encouraged when the Maryland Judiciary updated Rule 9-205.3 effective in October and included many of the provisions of this legislation.

Child Justice strongly urges this Committee to extend its good work on judicial training and ensure that child custody evaluators are as well-trained as judges and give a favorable report to SB 222.

Respectfully submitted,

Eileen King
ED/Program Director
Child Justice, Inc.
8720 Georgia Ave.
Ste. 703
Silver Spring, MD 20910
301-283-1762 cell phone
<https://www.child-justice.org>

SB222 - G.pdf

Uploaded by: Gillian Houlihan

Position: FAV

1-15-26

Dear Judicial Committee,

My name is Gillian Houlihan, I am age 16. I live in Salisbury, Maryland. This letter is in support of Mary Beth Carozza's senate bill 222, this is my second time writting supporting this bill. I didn't have a custody evaluator, the judge took an opinion from two therapists whose weren't trained in my most recent custody court case. They didn't listen to what I wanted and my life would have been very different if it weren't for their untrained, unqualified and unjust opinions. The judge would not verify by speaking to me in all my court cases since I was 8 years old for the first case and 11 years old for the second case. For half of my life I have had to deal with these failed and faulty opinions of people who were untrained, barely talked to me and were biased. I would never want another child to experience what I did; to be ignored by those who are supposed to help them and to have their childhood taken from them. Please help the future children of Maryland.

Sincerely,
Gillian Houlihan

SB222 - Carozza JPR.pdf

Uploaded by: Kelly Kennan

Position: FAV

Kelly S. Kennan, DDS, PC

Cosmetic • Preventative • Family Dentistry

January 20, 2026

Senator Mary Beth Carozza

Senator Chris West

Maryland General Assembly/ JPR Committee

Annapolis, MD 21401

Delegate Kaufman

RE: Senate Bill 222/ HB 137 - Family Law - Child Custody Evaluators - Qualifications

I am Dr Kelly S. Kennan from Salisbury, MD - a practicing General Dentist in Wicomico County for over 27 years and a mother of twin 16 year old young ladies. I am on the Credentialing team for Blue Cross and Blue Shield Dental of Maryland and I am one of five on our dental team. I am a constituent of Senator Mary Beth Carozza District 38 (Business address) and Senator Johnny Mautz District 37 (Home: 5677 N Nithsdale Salisbury MD 21801). I am a "mandated reporter for abuse of elders/children" per my license & multiple required years of P.A.N.D.A. (Prevent Abuse and Neglect through Dental Awareness) training in the State of Maryland. I am now reporting abuse pertaining to myself & my children for the past 9 years through our judicial system in Maryland.

I strongly support Senate Bill 222 / HB 137 passing swiftly this year for the State of Maryland, & I urge you to place this Bill into action immediately to protect all parties in any custodial court cases - requiring transparency, qualified training, certifications & ethics for the Custodial Evaluators/Reports of any precious child in our state. This is essential to protect those case involving Domestic Violence, Post Separation Abuse and Child Abuse.

My family has been personally and profoundly affected by the Judicial System in Wicomico County, we did not have a proper custody case in 2021. (Custodial Case # 22-C-12-000277) This is a case of "Constructive Destruction" of my parental rights to co-parent, physically, psychologically and spiritually to raise my twin daughters.

Our Maryland court systems utilized "solely" - the custodial opinions of two social workers, who were not trained or certified in Custodial Evaluations/Reports and they were not Court Ordered Custody Evaluators in my case. They were not neutral, unbiased, and not trained in coercive control and manipulation of an abused parent and children.

Plus, my case's ill-trained individuals breached the Ethics Rules for the Board of the State of Maryland for Social Works and the Board of the Psychiatric/Psychology - by a "DUAL ROLE" breach and a " Breach of Duty". (seven (+) roles in our custodial case) They were a "conflict of interest & should have recused themselves". They did not.

kennandental.com

1820 Sweetbay Dr. • Suite 104 • Salisbury, MD 21804
410-742-4339 • Fax 410-742-4388

KSK
1.16.2026

Instead, they took on multiple overlapping roles as :

1. A CPS Evaluator
2. Inexperienced newly enlisted CPS Evaluator
3. Individual Therapist
4. Family Therapists
5. A Court Ordered Child Therapist
6. A nonchalant "Custodial Opinion" as Social Workers.
7. Continued a CPS evaluation after dismissal of a CPS case in 2017 for years (typed certified court transcripts from 2021 can be provided)
8. After court ended in 2021, they still continued these roles

They shared the same professional therapeutic office less than 600 sq feet with the same common space for patients. They both continued with personal CPS evaluations of myself and my children for multiple years: even after the court ordered dismissal of our CPS case in 2018. (Case # C-22-FM-17-1402 from 2017) These personal evaluators were unscrupulous, having no boundaries, lacked objectivity, all without signed medical therapeutic consent for legal therapeutic evaluation (A Breach of Duty- lack of informed consent) and not court ordered. Our court system was used as a tool to further hurt myself and my daughters on a multi-tiered level and abuse through our judicial system where we should have protection. They have been notorious for causing problems with other custodial cases since mine in our area.

Credentialing Team perspective: Unethical conduct of this nature by a dentist in the state of Maryland would put them in disciplinary actions by the Board of Dental Examiners in Maryland, and potential loss of their license and a malpractice liability. Our Credentialing team would be notified by the Board of Dental Examiners, we would be uplifting their insurance participation contracts with these professionals to protect any future dental care provided to our insured patients.

Our judicial system restricted me from presenting issues by these individuals to their Boards or to protect other people using their services in our county/state. Instead, the Judicial system protected these " Unqualified, untrained and not certified Custodial opinions" of my children and myself. These individuals would not recuse themselves based on their financial gain & arrogance. They are unable to view the mental damage and trauma imposed upon the children and their families. This exemplifies another failure to protect our children and our families - SB222/ HB137 is past due & critical to be enforced.

Please understand the personal damage of these faulty decisions by unschooled evaluators. Fortunately, we are alive but traumatized, once again abused and suffering daily after these court mandated results. We live for short lived simple times and peace - our values are of a deeper level. Taking years to regain bonding relationships, nurturing, love and trust with your child. This unnecessary trauma will form my daughters relationships with others in their future, spouses and their own children. Does this trauma need to be repetitious & my children return to our state delegation requesting the same as we are trying to prevent this now?

KSA
1.16.2026

These are precious moments lost for any parent and child - homework, laundry, lunches, cupcakes for class, crushes, dances, artwork, carpooling, sports interactions, etc etc etc - including the joys and sorrows stolen from a parent and child that would normally occur as inconsequential everyday events.

The involvement of both parents in a child's life is crucial for their well-rounded upbringing and growth. They need diverse role models, balanced perspectives, nurturing support to allow children to reach their full potential and overall well-being. All of these moments were stolen from my daughters, myself and my family due to an "unqualified unordered custodial opinion with no custodial report presented". My parental time had been robbed & denied for trying to protect my children through our broken judicial system.

In many highly contested custody cases, children are young, already abused, scared of the judicial process, untrusting and their voices are lost in translation by Unqualified Custodial Evaluators. In my case, my daughters were all of the above - plus they wanted to talk to the Judge "face to face" in two court cases - 2018/ age 8 & 2021/ age 11 ½ - and they were denied the opportunity. Is anyone seeing the fallout and uncaring steps in custodial court cases? My children and I are living proof.

Our Judicial system is relying upon the ethical standards of those experts in any courtroom. Without proper training and qualifications, Custody Evaluators cannot truly be trusted to maintain a professional decorum and work in good faith with the system to recuse themselves from cases where they offer no expertise. This Senate Bill is creating safety of parents/children involved in abuse & in any Highly Contested Custody Cases in the State of Maryland. This unending damage is voluminous. It is simple. Be properly trained, credentialed or step down.

We have waited far too long for this bill to become a law.

I am requesting full favorable support of SB Bill 222/ HB137 due to the failure of our Judicial System to create Qualified Training and Boundaries of any and all Custodial Evaluators/ Evaluations.

Honorably and Respectfully -



Kelly S Kennan, DDS

1-16-2026

My mother and I have represented our family for the past three years with Senator Carozza and Delegate Kaufman for those hearings. I submitted a local petition of those locally concerned in our area last year within a two week period. Hundreds of families. Please let this Bill transition into Law in 2026.

In Favor — Sign Below — 2025

MARYLAND Senate Bill 25/ House Bill 152 :

Family Law Child custody training and qualifications requirements
2/18/2025 - Senator Mary Beth Carozza

Petition of Signatures ASAP :This needs to be put into law this session.
Maryland families have waited far too long for this commonsense child protection bill to become law - the judicial system is pushing back that it is not necessary to protect our children.

This Bill will require a CHILD CUSTODY EVALUATOR to be TRAINED AND QUALIFIED for an custodial evaluation in the State of Maryland.

Please sign below:

- | Name | City, State |
|---------------------------------|-----------------|
| 1. Kelly S. Kennan DDS | Salisbury, Md. |
| 2. Juan Rivera | Laurel, DE |
| 3. April Oakley | Salisbury MD |
| 4. NIKKI A.B. Clark | Parsonsburg, MD |
| 5. Susana Fun Sundaral | Laurel DE |
| 6. Jufferny Carr | Delmar, DE |
| 7. Tammy Schaeel | salisbury ms |
| 8. Mr Martid Sanchez | Salisbury, MD |
| 9. Leo Euraque | Salisbury, MD |
| 10. Mark Tadehy | Delmar, MD |
| 11. Dan Long Smith | Salisbury, MD |
| 12. Liz Connors | Seaford, DE |
| 13. Ashley Stitt | Delmar, DE |
| Richard Daniels | Parsonsburg MD |

- | | | |
|----|------------------------|------------------|
| - | Aurora Webster | Eden MD. |
| 13 | Caitlin Fitzhugh | Delmar, MD |
| 14 | Ronald L. Edwards | Deal Is. Md. |
| 15 | Jacqueline Edwards | Deal Is Md |
| 16 | Elizabeth Sparks | Salisbury, MD |
| 17 | Ala. Burt | Salisbury, MD |
| 18 | Angela Meister-Kiskal | Salisbury, MD |
| 19 | Kathleen Jones | Willards md. |
| 20 | Brittany Empson | Salisbury, MD |
| 21 | Jami Tripp | Laurel, DE |
| 22 | Susan D. Wilk | Salisbury, MD |
| 23 | Callan Wyatt | Delmar, DE |
| 24 | Ashley Sto | Delmar, DE |
| 25 | Dennis Rash | PARSONS BONA MD |
| 26 | Wendy Anpacker | Salisbury, MD |
| 27 | Orly Leere | Salisbury, MD |
| 28 | Sandra Spedden | " " |
| 29 | Heather Shores | Berlin MD |
| 30 | Carol Bicker | Salisbury MD. |
| 31 | Skyler Brazell | ELICOTT CITY, MD |
| | Genie Bulten Wiersburg | Eden Md |
| | Richard Wiersburg | Eden, Md. |

02.24.2025

IN FAVOR of:

MARYLAND Senate Bill 25/House Bill 152 :

Family Law Child custody training and qualifications requirements
2/18/2025 - Senator Mary Beth Carozza

Petition of Signatures ASAP:

This needs to be put into law this session.

Maryland families have waited far too long for this commonsense child protection bill to become law - the judicial system is pushing back that it is not necessary to protect our children.

This Bill will require a CHILD CUSTODY EVALUATOR to be TRAINED AND QUALIFIED for an custodial evaluation in the State of Maryland.

Please sign below:

Name	City, State
1. <i>[Signature]</i>	Delmar, MD
2. <i>[Signature]</i>	Salisbury Md
3. <i>[Signature]</i>	Salisbury, MD
4 Linda Ruffman	DelMAR md
5 <i>[Signature]</i>	Salisbury, MD.
6 Dawn Banta-Kerr	Salisbury, MD
7 Beverly B. Pusey	Delmar, Md.
8 Patrick Adams	Mardela Springs MD.
9 DANIEL WILKIN	SALISBURY MD.
10 Julie Weir	SALISBURY md
- Jacquelyn Whitford	Millards, md.
- Linda Suffer	Custheld md
- Wm. Cary Suffer	Custheld, md.

- | | | |
|----|-------------------------|------------------|
| 11 | Jackie | Mar dela Springs |
| 12 | Rebecca Sittermary | Salisbury MD |
| 13 | Julie Giordano | Hebron, MD |
| 14 | Tom Luffman, JR | Delmar, MD |
| 15 | Cash McEneaney | Salisbury, MD |
| 16 | Holly S. Spilunik-Adams | Salisbury, MD. |
| 17 | Blair Willing | Ocean Pines, MD. |
| 18 | Woody Willing | Salisbury, MD |
| 19 | Chris Staples | Pittsville MD |
| 20 | Keith Newton | Parsonsburg MD |
| 21 | Kevin A. Hearn | Salisbury |
| 22 | Don | Salisbury MD |
| 23 | Tom Bell | Pittsville md |
| 24 | Milton Mincester | Salisbury |
| 25 | Rebecca Freed | Tyaskin, MD |
| 26 | Heather Langford | Salisbury, MD |
| 27 | David Smith | Salisbury, MD |
| 28 | Juliana Smith | Salisbury, MD |
| 29 | ALAN NEFF | SALISBURY MD |
| - | George Jackson | Denton, MD |
| - | Shirley Jackson | Denton, MD |

30 Sherry Neff ~~Sherry Neff~~

31 Harriette Hammond

32 Susan T DeBont

33 Susan M Boudo

34 Marita Barnes

35 Jane Reagon

36 ~~Barren Herr~~

37 Buddy Chatham

38 Kayla Chatham

39 Helen Hugler

40 Ray D Sal

41 ~~Jarom~~

42 Jeffrey Shaheen

43 Alannah DeBont

44 ~~Karen White~~

45 Ruby Dshill

46 Denise Hurlitz

47 ~~Shane~~

- Kelly Edrock

- Fonda Brooks

- Will Rukland

Eden MD.

Salisbury MD

Willards, Md.

Salisbury, MD

Salisbury, MD

Salisbury, Md.

Salisbury, Md

Salisbury Md

Eden Md

Eden Md

Lanex, DE

Salisbury MD

Quantico MD

Denton MD

Salisbury, MD

Salisbury

Salisbury

Fruitland

Salisbury, MD

Annapolis Md

Ocean Pines, Md

Delmar, Md.

IN FAVOR OF:

MARYLAND Senate Bill 25/House Bill 152 :

Family Law Child Custody: Training and Qualifications Requirements 2/18/2025 - Senator Mary Beth Carozza

Petition of Signatures ASAP:

This needs to be put into law this session.

Maryland families have waited far too long for this commonsense child protection bill to become law - the judicial system is pushing back that it is not necessary to protect our children.

This Bill will require: CHILD CUSTODY EVALUATOR to be TRAINED AND QUALIFIED for an Custodial Evaluation in the State of Maryland.

Please Sign Below: IN FAVOR OF SENATE BILL 25 & HOUSE BILL 152:

Name

City, State

1)	Ron Jones	Salisbury, MD
2)	Pamela Key	Salisbury, MD
3)	Fred Davis	Salisbury md.
4)	[Signature]	Salisbury
5)	[Signature]	Salisbury MD
6)	Theresa Talbot	Salisbury md 443-944-5728
7)	Kristina Gold	Morton MD
8)	David Schoolfield	Salisbury, MD
9)	Delores Deepree	Salis MD
10)	Cynthia Landon	Salisbury MD
11)	[Signature]	Salisbury, MD

- Kay Bunch
- Angie Culwen
- Heather Nelson

- Delmar, md.
- Delmar, md.
- ocean City, md.

12)	Hannah Lewis	Waco, md
13)	Noah Perry	Salis, md
14)	Ryantha Perry	Salis md
15)	Paragrat Saper	Salisbury, MD
16)	John C. Saper	Sal md.
17)	Marin Mar	Laurel md
18)	Michael Alver	Salisbury MD
19)	Gregory Smith	salisbury, MD
20)	Jessica Spitzer	Salisbury, MD
21)	Marcos Harou	Salisbury MD
22)	Sam Joseph	Marble Hill, MD
23)	Ellen Moran	Salis, MD
24)	John F. Smith	Salisbury MD
25)	Chris Bally	Del
26)	Margaret T. T. T.	Salisbury MD
27)	Sharon K. Ball	Salisbury md
28)	Lynn	Salisbury MD
29)	Kathy Hill	Salisbury, MD
30)	Kimberly	Salis, MD

31) Anthony Lopez An Lopez Salisbury MD

32) Joanna Brown PARSONS BURG, MD

33) Robert Perry PARSONS BURG, MD

— Deb Robinson Salisbury md.

IN FAVOR of:

MARYLAND Senate Bill 25/House Bill 152 :

Family Law Child custody training and qualifications requirements
2/18/2025 - Senator Mary Beth Carozza

Petition of Signatures ASAP:

This needs to be put into law this session.





Maryland families have waited far too long for this commonsense child protection bill to become law - the judicial system is pushing back that it is not necessary to protect our children.

This Bill will require a CHILD CUSTODY EVALUATOR to be TRAINED AND QUALIFIED for an custodial evaluation in the State of Maryland.

Please sign below:

Name

City, State

1. Gillian Hanlhan Salisbury Md
2. Charlotte Hanlhan Salisbury Md
3.  (Eugene McVinch) Denton, MD
4. C Sams Cynthia Sams Greensboro MD.
5. Cassidy Messix Preston, MD
6. DANIEL LANE SALISBURY, MD.
7.  R.D. Hunt, MD Salisbury, MD.
8. Sam Bramble Salisbury, MD
9. Kenya  Salisbury, MD
10.  Beya Salisbury, MD
- Peg Chlada Salisbury, Md.
- Dawn Fields Tucker Delmar, MD / DE

- 11 ~~105~~ ^{Hibiscus} 105 ~~505~~ Salisbury md
- 12 Dawson Salisbury MD
- 13 Charles Joseph Emmer Salisbury
- 14 ~~Cliff~~ Salis
- 15 Brenda Cary Salisbury, MD
- 16 Judith S. Kavanagh, Salisbury, Maryland
- 17 David Ware Salisbury
- 18 Wanda Fink Salisbury
- 19 J. E. Nutt Salisbury
- 20 Jeffrey Clark Salisbury
- 21 Aletha Clark Salisbury
- 22 Kenneth M. Call SALISBURY
- 23 Mike Howard Salisbury
- 24 Lacey Lee Salisbury
- 25 W. K. Kruceley Salisbury
- 26 Jeanne L. Kruceley Salisbury, MD.
- 27 Roy Thompson Salisbury, MD.
- 28 Klaudia Thompson Salisbury, MD
- 29 Ryan Park Salisbury, MD
 Kim Parken Salis. Md
 Ted Parken Salis. Md.



- 30 ~~Alton~~ Salisbury MD
- 31 ~~Allen~~ SALISBURY, MD
- 32 Lilly Perry Salisbury, MD
- 33 ~~Myra Palmer~~ 11, md, MD
- 34 ~~Carol Hill~~ Salisbury
- 35 John B. Hall Salisbury
- 36 Kimberly C. Renner
- 37 Arida Cadey
- 38 Er Beelen Salisbury
- 39 Derek Bechen Salisbury
- 40 Wesley Cox
- 41 Tarrak Cava
- 42 Carl C. Palmer Jr
- 43 Susan ~~Greene~~
- 44 ~~John~~ L. Worth Salisbury, MD
- 45 ~~[Signature]~~ Salisbury, MD
- 46 Dee L. Davidson
- 47 Stephanie Wilkes Salis. Md
- ~~[Signature]~~ Salis Md,
- Kim Jenkins/Hatten Delmar Md

48 Brian McCreech, Salisbury, MD

49 Deana Mullin Deana Mullin

50 David Mullin David Mullin

51 Beth Wyatt Salisbury

52. J. K. Crada Salisbury

53. John J. Felt - Salisbury

54. Kurt R. - Salisbury, MD

55. Jennifer Doff Salisbury, MD

56. Dana Lopper Salisbury, MD

57. Peggy Gennert Salisbury MD

58. Gail D. Moore Salisbury MD

59. Corole Naumen Salisbury MD

60. Vanessa Cross Hill Salisbury, MD

61. Lillian M. Smith Salisbury MD

62. Sandra Heineman Salisbury, MD

63. Dabra P. Wilkin Delmar.

64. Enna Miller Salisbury MD

65. Deborah Nell Bahinson Breda Delmar MD

66. Hingui Trade Salisbury MD

67. Mary Ann Atkins, Salisbury, MD

68. Doree Mathis HEbron, MD

69. Judy M. Halt Salisbury

70. Clarah. Small Salisbury, MD

MARYLAND Senate Bill 25/House Bill 152 :

Family Law Child custody training and qualifications requirements
2/18/2025 - Senator Mary Beth Carozza

Petition of Signatures ASAP :This needs to be put into law this session.

Maryland families have waited far too long for this commonsense child protection bill to become law - the judicial system is pushing back that it is not necessary to protect our children.

This Bill will require a CHILD CUSTODY EVALUATOR to be TRAINED AND QUALIFIED for an custodial evaluation in the State of Maryland.

Please sign below:

Name	City, State
1. Tiffany Martinez	Delmar, DE
2. Jennifer Carr	Salisbury, Md
3. Michelle Carr	Salisbury, MD
4. _____	Delmar, DE
5. Anthony Carr	Salisbury, MD
6. Precious Niskey	Princess Anne, Maryland
7. Ashley Purnell	Delmar DE
8. Robert Purnell	Delmar DE
9. Julian Chavez	Salisbury, MD
10. Nettie Martinez	Delmar, MD
11. Marcus Smiley	Salisbury md
12. Chris Co	Salisbury Md.
- Debra Wingfield, PHD	North Carolina
- Josea Bales	Salisbury Md.

13 Anna Panda
14 Dennis Panda

15 John W. Tull

16 Lory Jean

17 DANA PETERSON

18 Colby Hamilton

19 Mark Bunting

20 Robert D. [Signature]

21 Paula M. Sparrano

22 Carla Bailey

23 Carl Bailey

24 Doris C. Berman PhD

25 Robert [Signature]

Delmar MD
Delmar MD

Salisbury, MD

Salisbury, MD

PARSONSBURG, MD

Beclin, MD

Salisbury, MD.

Cristfield, MD.

Pocomoke, MD

Salisbury MD

Salisbury MD

Wentown MD

Wentown MD.

26 Susan [Signature]

27 RICARD [Signature]

28 Susie Bunting

29 Rene Adkins

30 Kathleen Wildonen

31 Ron Wildonen

32 Dawn Bonenberg

33 Phil Wheatley

Salisbury MD

SALISBURY, MD

Salis, Md.

Mandela Springs, Md

Salis. Md

Salis. Md

Salis. Md.

Salis. Md.

LC Testimony.pdf

Uploaded by: Lauren Cooper

Position: FAV



**Worcester County
Child Advocacy Center**

9714 Healthway Drive
P. O. Box 97
Berlin, Maryland 21811

Telephone: 410-641-0097
Fax: 410-641-0935

E-Mail: LCooper@worcestermd.gov
Website: www.worcestercac.org

Lauren Cooper
Executive Director

Board of Directors

Kristin Heiser, State's Attorney
President

Sheriff Matthew Crisafulli
Vice President

Stefanie Franklin
Treasurer

Ethan Holland
Secretary

Roberta Baldwin
Dr. Christina Welch
Kathy Denk
Lt. Earl Stamer
Belinda Gulyas

**A 501(c)(3) Organization
Federal ID# 26-0177198**

National Children's Alliance
Accredited Member

Maryland Children's Alliance
Member

January 16, 2026

To the members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee:

I strongly support SB 222 – Family Law – Child Custody Evaluators – Qualifications and ask for a swift and favorable report on this important child protection legislation.

SB 222 would help ensure the safety and well-being of children involved in child custody court proceedings where there are allegations of child abuse or domestic violence. This priority child safety legislation would require that child custody evaluators possess basic qualifications and receive foundational training before being appointed or approved by a court to conduct custody evaluations in these highly sensitive cases.

I have professional experience working in family services within the circuit court system and have seen firsthand the profound impact custody evaluations can have on children and families. In cases involving abuse or domestic violence, the evaluator's training, judgment, and understanding of trauma are critical. When evaluators lack appropriate qualifications or specialized training, the risk to children increases, sometimes leaving lifelong consequences.

This legislation is about putting the child first, and passage of SB 222 is long overdue. For the past six years, legislation has been introduced to require that qualified and properly trained child custody evaluators be appointed in these most sensitive custody cases involving domestic violence and child abuse. SB 222 mirrors the Judiciary's updated Rule 9-205.3, and it is imperative that these vital child protections be codified into law without further delay.

Placing clear qualification and training requirements into statute will help protect children in potentially dangerous custody cases and promote more informed, trauma-responsive decision-making by the courts.

I urge you to support SB 222. Thank you for your time, attention, and consideration.

Sincerely,

Lauren Cooper
Executive Director
Worcester County Child Advocacy Center

DRMtestimony2026.SB222.pdf

Uploaded by: Leslie Margolis

Position: FAV

SENATE JUDICIAL PROCEEDINGS COMMITTEE

SENATE BILL 222: FAMILY LAW—CHILD CUSTODY EVALUATORS—QUALIFICATIONS

DATE: JANUARY 20, 2026

POSITION: SUPPORT

Disability Rights Maryland (DRM) is the protection and advocacy organization for the state of Maryland; the mission of the organization, part of a national network of similar agencies, is to advocate for the legal rights of people with disabilities throughout the state. DRM supports Senate Bill 222, which would impose a set of qualifications on child custody evaluators, including the requirement that evaluators have demonstrated knowledge of and experience in disability-related issues.

DRM is involved in ongoing efforts through the Administrative Office of the Courts to ensure that court proceedings address the needs of participants with disabilities, particularly those with mental health or developmental disabilities.

At the time of passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act, 20 U.S.C. §12101 *et seq.* in 1990, Congress found that people with disabilities have encountered “the discriminatory effects of...exclusionary qualification standards and criteria” and that they have faced discrimination “resulting from stereotypic assumptions not truly indicative of the individual ability of such individuals.”¹ Congress also found that “discriminatory policies and practices affect people with disabilities in every aspect of their lives...[including]securing custody of their children.”²

In 2014, the Maryland Commission on Child Custody Decisionmaking issued a report that included the Report of the Disability Bias and Neutral-Language Subcommittee. The Subcommittee found a history of bias against parents with disabilities and additionally found that child custody decisions were made on the basis of assumptions, e.g., that a parent with a particular type of disability is not capable of parenting. The Subcommittee recommended training for all family court professionals on a regular basis about parents with disabilities and their children. Additionally, the Subcommittee recommended that custody evaluations include supporting evidence regarding use of best practices to assess any disability-related issue and training to ensure that custody determinations are based on evidence, not assumptions. During the past year, DRM has participated in training court personnel and child custody evaluators and

¹ 20 U.S.C. §§12101(a)(5) and 12101(a)(7).

² H.R. Rep. No. 485, Pt. 3 at 25.

DRM Testimony: Senate Bill 222

January 20, 2026

Page Two

is participating in judicially-led efforts to address these issues. Passage of Senate Bill 222 would reinforce these efforts. For these reasons, DRM supports Senate Bill 222.

Please contact Leslie Seid Margolis at lesliem@disabilityrightsmd.org or 443-692-2505 with questions.

Respectfully submitted,

Leslie Seid Margolis

Managing Attorney and Policy Counsel

SB 222 - Senator Carozza Testimony_FINAL.pdf

Uploaded by: Mary Beth Carozza

Position: FAV

MARY BETH CAROZZA
Legislative District 38
Somerset, Wicomico,
and Worcester Counties

Education, Energy, and
the Environment Committee



Annapolis Office
James Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street, Room 316
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
410-841-3645 • 301-858-3645
800-492-7122 Ext. 3645
Fax 410-841-3006 • 301-858-3006
MaryBeth.Carozza@senate.state.md.us

Executive Nominations Committee

THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

January 20, 2025

The Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

SB 222 Family Law – Child Custody Evaluators – Qualifications

Statement of Support by Bill Sponsor Senator Mary Beth Carozza

Thank you Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and members of the distinguished Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee for this opportunity to present Senate Bill 222, Child Custody Evaluators – Qualifications for the sixth consecutive session, and to respectfully urge a favorable report for this priority child protection legislation.

I present this bill on behalf of the many Maryland families, children and child safety advocates who remain committed to passage of legislation ensuring qualified and trained child custody evaluators whose recommendations impact the placement of children, many of whom have already experienced trauma and should be protected.

For the past five sessions, we have been working in good faith with the Judiciary and other organizations to revise this bill for final passage. As way of background, this child custody evaluators qualifications and training bill was developed out of the work and recommendations of the Workgroup to Study Child Custody Court Proceedings Involving Child Abuse or Domestic Violence Allegations established by SB 567 (2019). The Workgroup was chaired by former Maryland Secretary of State John Wobensmith and former Senator and JPR member, Susan Lee and I also served on the Workgroup.

Serving on that Workgroup has been one of my most important public service assignments, given the magnitude of the trauma that many children and their protective parents experience when child abuse or domestic violence is alleged during court custody proceedings.

The Workgroup's final report included 20 recommendations, two of which were legislative recommendations related to the training of judges in child custody cases involving child abuse or domestic violence and the training and qualifications of child custody evaluators.

In 2022, this Committee and the Maryland General Assembly approved Senate Bill 17, sponsored by Senator Chris West, requiring the training of judges presiding over child custody cases involving child abuse and domestic violence.

It only makes sense that child custody evaluators meet certain qualifications and be trained along the same lines as the judges, especially given the heavy reliance of judges on the recommendations of child custody evaluators.

Over the past couple of years, working with the Judiciary, we have made significant progress with this updated and revised bill which reflects the recently updated Judiciary Rule for child custody evaluators. In 2024, a bipartisan workgroup made up of Delegate Crutchfield, Delegate Kaufman, Senator West and myself met with Judge Dumais representing the Maryland Judiciary to work together on updating and strengthening Rule 9-205.3, which are the regulations the Maryland Judiciary follows regarding the appointment or approval by a court of a person to perform a child custody evaluation.

We are grateful for Judge Dumais' leadership and her work to update Rule 9-205.3, and Senate Bill 222 before you today reflects the updated Judiciary Rule effective October 1, 2025. The Rule and SB 222 includes two amendments agreed upon last session to specify that Custody Evaluators should have demonstrated knowledge of (1) child sexual abuse and (2) disability-related issues.

SB 222 also includes the Judiciary's amendment that the Court may waive the requirements for a court employee or an individual under contract with the court who conducted custody evaluations for at least 14 years prior to January 1, 2025; has completed a training program that conforms to the guidelines established by the Administrative Office of the Courts, and completes at least 20 hours per year of continuing education relevant to conducting custody evaluations.

A question has been raised in the past on whether the child custody evaluator qualifications and training requirements should be in a Rule or in a Statute. The logical response is it can be and should be in both. Impacted families and child protection advocates have been demanding that these qualifications and training requirements for child custody evaluators be put into law just as the judges' training bill was put into law in 2022.

Additionally, while Maryland recognizes that a Rule "shall have the force of law" without actually being law, it is unclear whether the federal government would share that recognition, and therefore, any federal funding through Kayden's Law or other federal statutes could be in jeopardy and not available to the State of Maryland without passage of Senate Bill 222.

Senate Bill 222 is a child protection bill especially when you think about the 21 Maryland children who were killed between 2008 – 2023 when divorce, separation, custody visitation, child support or court-involvement is a factor and when we think about the thousands of other children that have been traumatized when these same factors are involved.

Putting in statute that Maryland's child custody evaluators will be qualified and trained helps protect children in these most sensitive and potentially dangerous child custody cases involving allegations of child abuse and domestic violence and also builds good will and trust with the Judiciary.

When we think about the many qualifications and training bills that the Maryland General Assembly has passed into law over the years that impact positions NOT dealing with our most precious responsibility, our children, I believe we as legislators have a moral obligation to pass

the child custody evaluators qualifications and training bill this session and ensure that it becomes law this year. It simply is long overdue.

I know this Committee recognizes that child custody evaluators have an important role in assisting family law courts in determining custody outcomes, especially in the most sensitive and difficult cases involving allegations of domestic violence and child abuse.

Over the past five years of sponsoring this legislation, we have heard testimonials from several protective parents and children who were put in danger due to an untrained, unqualified custody evaluator.

- Hera McLeod's story firmly shows why consistent qualifications and training for child custody evaluators are desperately needed. Hera McLeod was a protective parent from Montgomery County who separated from her child's father on July 17, 2011 (Case Number: Family Law 96093). The child custody evaluator assigned to her case understood that the father, Joaquin Rams, was dangerous to Hera and her son Prince, based on evidence presented by several witnesses in Rams' life who believed he routinely abused his older son and that he had already killed two people. Unfortunately, Rams' attorney was able to have the child custody evaluator's testimony disregarded due to the lack of training and credentials of the child custody evaluator. In October of 2012, Prince was murdered by his father when he was 15 months old. In the opinion of Paul Griffin, Child Justice, Inc. Legal Director, if child custody evaluators were required to have qualifications and training, Hera's case most likely would have had a different outcome and Prince would be alive today. I agree.

The purpose and essence of this bill is to protect children in vulnerable circumstances from further harm. I have heard too many cases where children were put in danger again and again because the court has ordered the child be in the presence of their abuser, and a majority of those decisions were based on the conclusions of an unqualified and untrained custody evaluator. Now I am hearing about cases where the recommendations of untrained and unqualified child custody evaluators from years ago are today still affecting the safety of children and protective parents.

The time is now to pass SB 222, to put it into law and to ensure that child custody evaluators meet certain qualifications and training requirements to better protect our children, many of whom are experiencing trauma, as they go through a custody court proceeding involving child abuse or domestic violence allegations.

Mr. Chair and Vice Chair, let this be the year that all our good faith efforts over the years result in your favorable report and final passage of SB 222. Thank you for your kind attention and consideration.

1 14 2026 SB 222 Letter of Support.pdf

Uploaded by: Sharon Donahue

Position: FAV

D**L****G****Donahue Law Group**

11724 Ocean Gateway, Suite 3
Ocean City, MD 21842
410-213-1147 Fax 410-213-1128
www.donahuelawgroup.net

Sharon M. Donahue
Admitted in Maryland & The District of Columbia

January 14, 2026

IN RE SENATE BILL 222

**By: Senators Carozza and West
Judicial Proceedings**

**To the members of the House Judiciary and Senate Judicial Proceedings
Committees:**

I, Sharon M. Donahue, Esq. of The Law Firm of Sharon M. Donahue, P.A. (d/b/a The Donahue Law Group) strongly support SB 222 – Family Law – Child Custody Evaluators – Qualifications and ask for a swift and favorable report on this important child protection legislation.

SB 222 would help ensure the safety and well-being of children involved in child custody court proceedings involving child abuse or domestic violence. This priority child safety legislation would require that child custody evaluators have basic qualifications and receive basic training before being appointed or approved by a court to perform a custody evaluation in those child custody cases involving domestic violence or child abuse.

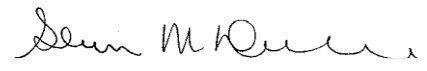
Having practiced family law with a strong focus on child custody cases over the past twenty years, far too often custody evaluations are assigned to Licensed Clinical Social Workers that lack specific clinical training in child abuse, particularly in circumstances where the children are products of generational trauma, violence and drug abuse in the home. Oftentimes, the court relies solely on the recommendation of the Custody Evaluator to the exclusion of other voices in the courtroom (including child counsel). As a result, the decisions made may not be in the best interests of the children being evaluated. Although custody evaluators are well-meaning, there needs to be a benchmark of training for the evaluators as well as having more experienced evaluators mentor the less experienced evaluators to make sure Maryland's children are treated fairly and their best interests and safety are protected. Thus, we need to ensure the selection of qualified and trained child custody evaluators in child custody cases involving domestic violence and child abuse.

This legislation is all about putting the child first, and passage of SB 222 is long overdue. For the past six years, legislation has been introduced to require qualified and trained child custody evaluators to be appointed in these most sensitive child custody cases involving domestic violence and child abuse. This legislation mirrors the Judiciary's updated Rule 9-205.3, and it is imperative that these vital child protections are passed into law without further delay.

Putting in statute that Maryland's child custody evaluators will be qualified and trained will help protect children in these most sensitive and potentially dangerous child custody cases involving allegations of child abuse and domestic violence.

I urge you to support SB 222. Thank you for your kind attention and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Sharon M. Donahue".

Sharon M. Donahue

LCPCM-SB 222 - Family Law - Child Custoday Evaluat

Uploaded by: Andrea Mansfield

Position: FWA



Committee: Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
Bill: SB 222 - Family Law - Child Custody Evaluators - Qualifications
Hearing Date: January 20, 2025
Position: Favorable with Amendments

The Licensed Clinical Professional Counselors of Maryland (LCPCM) supports Senate Bill 222 - Family Law - Child Custody Evaluators – Qualifications with amendments. This bill establishes parameters for who is qualified to evaluate children to advise the court in custody determinations.

The bill stems from the recommendations of the Workgroup to Study Child Custody Court Proceedings Involving Child Abuse or Domestic Violence Allegations, which was established by SB 567 in the 2019 session.

We strongly support this bill because custody evaluators need to be qualified and have specific training in the subject matter. LCPCM offers the following amendment to further strengthen the competency and qualifications of custody evaluators. This amendment will require that all custody evaluators hold a professional license issued by the State and have satisfied all national examination requirements customarily required for independent clinical licensure in that profession at the time the license was issued.

On page 3, following line 10, insert, A CUSTODY EVALUATOR SHALL HOLD A PROFESSIONAL LICENSE ISSUED BY THE STATE AND HAVE SATISFIED NATIONAL EXAMINATION REQUIREMENTS REQUIRED FOR THE PROFESSION AT THE TIME THE LICENSED WAS ISSUED.

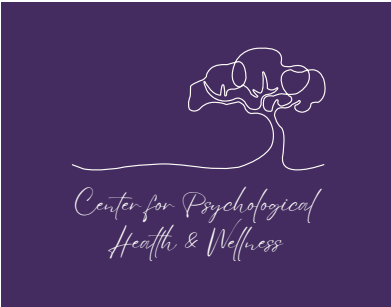
LCPCM urges the Committee to give SB 222 a FAVORABLE Report with the suggested amendment as Maryland’s children deserve and need competent professionals to help guide the courts.

Please contact Andrea Mansfield at amansfield@maniscanning.com or (410) 562-1617 if we can provide additional information.

SenateBill 0222 House Bill 137 Favorable w Amendme

Uploaded by: Heidi Ramsbottom

Position: FWA



Center for Psychological Health and Wellness, LLC
Heidi Ramsbottom, Ph.D.
122 W Lancaster Ave, Suite 206
Shillington, PA 19607
Ph: 484-509-0499 Fax: 484-324-6685

Written Testimony Submitted by:

Heidi Ramsbottom, PhD.
Licensed Clinical Psychologist (Pennsylvania)
Custody Evaluator (Pennsylvania)
Center for Psychological Health and Wellness, LLC

Dear Honorable Legislators,

My name is Dr. Heidi Ramsbottom, and I submit this testimony in support of Senate Bill 0222 / House Bill 137, with amendments. I am a Pennsylvania-licensed clinical psychologist and the owner and clinical director of the Center for Psychological Health and Wellness, LLC, a group practice that provides mental health services to children, adolescents, adults, and families. A significant portion of my professional work includes court-involved services, including the completion of custody evaluations in Pennsylvania and clinical work with families involved in high-conflict custody disputes.

I appreciate the substantial effort that has gone into refining this legislation over multiple sessions. Compared to earlier iterations, many of the most problematic elements have been removed, and the current bill largely mirrors Maryland Rule 9-205.3 by giving it legislative force. That alignment is meaningful and appropriate.

At the same time, codifying an existing rule presents an important opportunity—and responsibility—to address areas that, in practice, have not functioned as well as intended.

Experience and Qualification Requirements: A Practical and Clinical Concern

As drafted, the bill allows qualification as a custody evaluator based on experience in only one listed category. From a clinical and forensic standpoint, this creates a meaningful risk. Custody evaluations routinely involve complex and overlapping issues, including:

- family system dynamics,
- child development,
- trauma and attachment,
- allegations of abuse or neglect,

- domestic violence, coercive control,
- high-conflict dynamics and contact refusal.

Permitting qualification based on experience in a single domain may allow an individual to meet the statutory threshold without demonstrated competence across the core areas that custody evaluations invariably require. For example, an individual whose experience has been limited to a narrowly defined population or setting—possibly even on a part-time basis—could technically qualify, despite lacking training or experience in family systems, trauma, or abuse dynamics.

Custody evaluators are not operating in narrow or siloed roles. Their opinions and recommendations directly affect:

- children’s living arrangements,
- parent–child relationships, and
- long-term psychological and emotional outcomes.

This work requires broad, integrated, and developmentally informed competence, not minimal threshold exposure. I therefore support clarifying the experience provisions so that custody evaluators must demonstrate meaningful knowledge and experience across all core subject areas identified in the Custody & Visitation-Related Assessments: Training Guidelines established by the Administrative Office of the Courts pursuant to Maryland Rule 9-205.3(d)(2).

Existing Safeguards Exist — But Are Not Reliably Accessible in Practice

Maryland already has safeguards intended to protect the quality and integrity of custody evaluations. The difficulty is not the absence of safeguards, but rather that they are often fragmented, difficult to locate, and unevenly understood or enforced by parties, attorneys, and sometimes evaluators themselves.

Maryland’s approved guidance, including the AFCC Guidelines for Parenting Plan Evaluations in Family Law Cases, identifies disclosure of specific information as a best practice. Section 4.3 explicitly states that, “At the first meeting with each of the parties, evaluators should review key elements of their policies and procedures.”

Incorporating this expectation directly into SB 0222 would help ensure that Maryland’s recognized best practices are consistently implemented, rather than applied inconsistently or left to individual discretion.

In real cases, parties often struggle to understand:

- what a custody evaluator may or may not do,
- how to raise concerns about bias, scope, or qualifications,
- what mechanisms exist for challenge, review, or removal.

Not all attorneys regularly practice in custody matters, and parents—whose fundamental rights and children’s well-being are at stake—are not trained to navigate a system spread across statutes, court rules, administrative orders, and professional guidelines.

Proposed Amendment: A Custody Evaluation Due Process Notice

For these reasons, I support a simple, practical amendment: requiring a Custody Evaluation Due Process Notice, sometimes analogized as a “Custody Miranda.”

Before any custody evaluation begins, all parties should receive a clear, standardized notice—on the record—explaining:

- the evaluator’s role and scope of authority,
- that the evaluator is not a treating therapist or an advocate for either party,
- that information obtained may be used in court proceedings,
- the right to raise concerns regarding bias, qualifications, or methodology, and
- the available processes for complaints, challenges, and judicial review.

This amendment does not create new rights. Rather, it ensures that existing rights are visible, understandable, and practically usable at the outset of a process that has profound consequences for children and families.

Why This Strengthens the Legislation

- Courts benefit from increased transparency and reduced post-evaluation litigation, including motions to strike, challenges to evaluator qualifications, and appeals.
- Qualified evaluators benefit from clearer standards that protect competent professionals and promote evaluations grounded in science-based, evidence-informed practice.
- Children benefit most when custody decisions are informed by sound methodology, qualified professionals, and processes that are clearly understood by all parties.

Most importantly, these measures reinforce that child safety and well-being—psychological, emotional, and physical—remain the central priority of custody evaluations.

Conclusion

I respectfully urge adoption of these amendments to SB 0222 / HB 137 to ensure that custody determinations in Maryland are informed by qualified evaluators, transparent processes, and a consistent commitment to due process and child welfare.

I appreciate the opportunity to provide this testimony. Thank you for your attention to this important matter and for your continued dedication to Maryland’s children and families.

Respectfully submitted,



Dr. Heidi Ramsbottom, Ph.D.
Licensed Clinical Psychologist (PA)
Custody Evaluator (PA)
Center for Psychological Health and Wellness, LLC

SB0222_DHS_FWA.pdf

Uploaded by: Justin Hayes

Position: FWA



DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

Wes Moore, Governor · Aruna Miller, Lt. Governor · Rafael López, Secretary

January 20, 2026

The Honorable William C. Smith, Jr., Chair
Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
2 East Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

**RE: TESTIMONY ON SB 222 - FAMILY LAW - CHILD CUSTODY EVALUATORS -
QUALIFICATIONS - POSITION: FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS**

Dear Chair Smith and Members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee:

The Maryland Department of Human Services (DHS) thanks the committee for its consideration and respectfully requests a favorable report with amendment for Senate Bill 222 (SB 222).

With offices in every one of Maryland's jurisdictions, DHS empowers Marylanders to reach their full potential by providing preventative and supportive services, economic assistance, and meaningful connections to employment development and career opportunities. The DHS Social Services Administration (SSA) oversees the Office of Child Prevention and Safety, whose purpose is to ensure the safety of children at risk of abuse and neglect across Maryland. SB 222 would add required qualifications and training for a professional to be appointed or approved as a custody evaluator by the court and for their eligibility to provide expert evidence in custody or visitation proceedings that include allegations of abuse. We see these changes as proactive measures that further our priorities for the safety and well-being of children.

SB 222 would ensure that a licensed professional conducts assessments of children and families who experienced trauma, and then provides a report with the outcome of that assessment to the court. This process allows judges to make informed decisions on the primary custody of children. Ensuring high-quality child custody practices is essential for the well-being of the children and families we serve.

DHS raised a concern with the sponsors about the impact we believe the bill would have on child in need of assistance (CINA) hearings. A separate custody assessment in

25 S. Charles Street, Baltimore, MD 21201-3500
Tel: 1-800-332-6347 | TTY: 1-800-735-2258 | www.dhs.maryland.gov

a CINA juvenile hearing would be redundant and an unnecessary burden on the child, family, and court, based on COMAR 07.02.11.20. The purpose of a CINA hearing is to review the Department's reasonable efforts to rectify safety concerns that led to a child being placed in out-of-home care. During these hearings, the services offered to the family, the parents' progress, and the parents' visitation rights are reviewed. Permanency plan hearings are held at least every six months and can be held more frequently if requested by an involved party. Courts and Judicial Proceedings Article § 3-816 describes the studies and evaluations that the court may currently order concerning a CINA proceeding.

Due to the circumstances outlined above, we propose an amendment to exclude CINA cases from the types of proceedings that require a custody evaluation. DHS is dedicated to achieving safe family reunification or placing children with kin.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide favorable testimony to the Committee for consideration during your deliberations. You will find our proposed amendment on the following page. We look forward to the decision of the Committee and welcome continued collaboration on SB 222.

If you require additional information, please contact Justin Hayes, Acting Director of Government Affairs, at justin.hayes1@maryland.gov.

In service,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rafael López', written in a cursive style.

Rafael López
Secretary

Proposed Amendment

Amendment No. 1

On page 1, lines 16 and 17 changed to read:

(B) ON MOTION OF A PARTY OR CHILD'S COUNSEL, OR ON ITS OWN INITIATIVE, A COURT, EXCEPT A COURT SITTING AS A JUVENILE COURT UNDER TITLE 3, SUBTITLE 8, OF COURTS AND JUDICIAL PROCEEDINGS, MAY:

SB2022_HB0137 2026 FWA-Krawczyk.pdf

Uploaded by: Laurie Krawczyk

Position: FWA

January 20, 2026
Maryland General Assembly 2026 Legislative Session
SB111/HB0137 Family Law-Child Custody Evaluators- Qualifications

Favorable with Amendments

Melissa Krawczyk
Jarrettsville, MD

To the Honorable Members of Judicial Proceedings and Judiciary Committee,

I am writing to lend my support in favor of SB222/HB0137 Family Law-Child Custody Evaluators- Qualifications *with amendments*.

This is now the fifth time that such a bill has been proposed, and while this bill is markedly better than previous versions, and is again no doubt well intended, there are still areas that are lacking or will better serve with clarification.

You'll read testimony from my colleagues that voices concerns over this ambiguity in experience and qualifications. I echo those concerns. Outlined in (E)(1)(V)(A), (B), and (C) (Page 2, lines 26-30, Page 3, lines 1-2) is "... WITH AT LEAST TWO YEARS OF EXPERIENCE IN" (A) "ONE OR MORE AREAS LISTED IN SUBSECTION (F)(4)" and (B) "CONDUCTING CUSTODY EVALUATIONS," and (C) ANY COMBINATION OF THE EXPERIENCE DESCRIBED IN ITEM A OR B OF THIS ITEM." The reality is that custody evaluations mandate an evaluator who is wholly competent in *all* areas of (F)(4), not just "ONE OR MORE..." Further, it would be ideal for there to be a minimum number of evaluations completed rather than just a time in practice. What if the evaluator only performs evaluations once in a while? That could leave them with only a few evaluations over two years rather than a minimum number of evaluations. **A proposed amendment here would be to clarify number of evaluations using the AAML Guide that Maryland Courts already rely on for training curriculum^{1,2}.**

The second concern with SB222/HB0137 is the list of qualifications for custody evaluators. As you are aware, custody evaluations require highly skilled and versed professionals with a broad and deep range of knowledge. This again is imperative when considering decisions regarding the life, welfare, and future of children and especially for children who are already the subject of contested custody. While the areas of knowledge listed in (F)(4) seem comprehensive, section (II) fails to include psychological and emotional abuse along with physical abuse, even though psychological abuse has been identified as being as equally harmful³. Further, there is no mention of parent-child contact problems. Interestingly, Maryland Courts already recognize the importance evaluators to be knowledgeable with parent-child contact problems, yet this item

¹ https://aaml.org/wp-content/uploads/MAT201_3.pdf page 12.

² <https://www.courts.state.md.us/legalhelp/family/custodyandvisitation>

³ <https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/2014/10/psychological-abuse>

continues to be unrecognized by any past and current proposed legislation⁴. It is perplexing why bill sponsors continue to avoid addressing psychological abuse in child custody legislation, considering it is a pervasive society problem, is recognized by other states, and is identified as being as harmful as sexual and physical abuse. **A proposed amendment would add psychological and emotional abuse to (F)(4)(II) and add (VII) Parent-child contact problems.**

I urge adapting clarifications to (E)(1)(V)(A), (B), and (C) and urge the legislature to once and for all understand the peril psychologically abused children suffer and address it in the mandated training requirements for evaluators. Maryland children deserve a better understanding of what they are experiencing when they are unfortunately in the center of contentious family proceedings.

Thank you for your work in protecting Maryland children.

Sincerely,
Melissa Krawczyk
Jarrettsville, MD

MACA written testimony MD SB0222.pdf

Uploaded by: Rael LaPenta

Position: FWA



Senate Bill 0222

MACA supports with amendments (FWA)

Written Testimony for Maryland House Legislation – SB 0222

Submitted by: Rael LaPenta, Mothers Against Child Abuse (MACA)

Position: Mothers Against Child Abuse (MACA) supports SB 222 / HB 137 with an amendment ensuring both due-process protections and safeguarding the qualifications of Maryland custody evaluators.

Dear Respected Legislator,

My name is Rael LaPenta, and I am writing as a representative of Mothers Against Child Abuse (MACA), a national organization dedicated to advocating for victims of child abuse and protecting children from all forms of maltreatment. On behalf of MACA, I respectfully submit this testimony favorable to Senate Bill 222, with amendments (FWA). We urge the legislature to consider this simple assurance that the intent of this legislation is fulfilled by requiring a Custody Evaluation Due Process Notice (sometimes analogized as a “Custody Miranda”).

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 222 / HB 137

Family Law – Child Custody Evaluators – Qualifications

Favorable with Amendments

To the Honorable Members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee and the House Judiciary Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on SB 222 / HB 137. We **appreciate the significant work** that has gone into refining this legislation over multiple sessions. Compared to earlier versions, many of the most problematic elements have been removed, and the bill now largely mirrors existing Maryland Rule 9-205.3 by giving it legislative force.

That said, giving legislative power to an existing rule also gives us an opportunity—**and a responsibility**—to fix what has not been working well in practice.

Experience Requirements: A Practical Concern

There are some ambiguities in the experience requirements, particularly the provision allowing qualification based on experience in only one listed category.

As drafted, the bill could permit qualification based on experience in only one listed category. This creates a risk that an evaluator may meet the statutory threshold without demonstrated competence in core areas routinely implicated in custody disputes, such as family dynamics, trauma, abuse allegations, or contact refusal. (For example: a graduate-level social worker who has worked primarily with individuals with disabilities for two years—possibly even part-time—could qualify as a custody evaluator.)

Custody evaluators are not working in narrow or siloed contexts and are making recommendations that affect children’s living arrangements, parent-child relationships, and long-term psychological well-being. That work requires broad, integrated competence, not minimal threshold exposure.

I support clarifying these provisions so that all evaluators are required to demonstrate meaningful knowledge and experience across all core subject areas listed in the [CUSTODY & VISITATION-RELATED ASSESSMENTS: TRAINING GUIDELINES](#) established by the Administrative Office of the Courts pursuant to Maryland Rule 9-205.3(d)(2).

Safeguards Exist — But They Are Not Always Working

Maryland already has safeguards intended to protect the quality and integrity of custody evaluations. The problem is not that safeguards do not exist; it is that they are often fragmented, difficult to locate, and unevenly understood or enforced.

In the Maryland approved guidance, the [AFCC Guidelines for Parenting Plan Evaluations in Family Law Cases](#), lists as a best practice that custody evaluators disclose specific information (p.15). “ 4.3 Reviewing of Policies and Procedures (a) At the first meeting with each of the parties, evaluators should review key elements...” Adding this in SB0222 ensures Maryland best practices are properly implemented.

In real cases, understanding: what an evaluator may or may not do, how to challenge bias or lack of qualifications, how to raise concerns, or how to seek review or removal, can feel like a scavenger hunt through Maryland laws, court rules, administrative orders, and professional guidelines.

Not all attorneys practice regularly in custody cases. And parents—whose fundamental rights and children are at stake—are certainly not trained to navigate this system.

Proposed Amendment: A Custody Evaluation Due Process Notice

For that reason, we are proposing a simple, practical amendment: a required **Custody Evaluation Due Process Notice**, which could be compared to a “Custody Miranda.” This approach mirrors due-process advisements required in other proceedings that substantially affect individual rights and child welfare.

Before any custody evaluation begins, all parties should receive a clear, standardized notice—on the record—explaining:

- the evaluator’s role and limits,
- that the evaluator is not a treating therapist or advocate,
- that information obtained may be used in court,
- the right to object to bias, lack of qualifications, or improper methods,
- and the available processes for complaints, challenges, and court review.

This proposal does not create new rights.

It simply **makes existing rights visible, understandable, and usable.**

Why This Strengthens the Bill

Courts benefit from transparency. Clear notice at the outset reduces post-evaluation litigation, motions to strike, and appeals, thereby supporting judicial efficiency.

Qualified evaluators benefit from clarity. Clear standards safeguard well-qualified professionals, encourage participation by truly qualified experts, and promote evaluations grounded in science-based, evidence-based research.

Children benefit from decisions based on sound, well-understood processes. Most importantly, these measures reinforce that child safety—including psychological, emotional, and physical well-being—remains the central priority of custody evaluations.

Conclusion

MACA urges adoption of these amendments to ensure that custody determinations in Maryland are informed by qualified evaluators, transparent processes, and a shared commitment to child safety.

We are available to meet, discuss further, and provide additional resources or clarification regarding this testimony. We appreciate your attention to this critical matter and for your dedication to Maryland’s children and families.

Respectfully,

Rael LaPenta

Mothers Against Child Abuse (MACA)

Appendix A: Proposed Custody Evaluation Due Process Notice

Custody evaluations substantially affect fundamental parental rights and child safety.

This section ensures meaningful informed consent, transparency, and procedural fairness, and prevents adjudication by evaluator without due process.

Custody Evaluation Due Process Notice *(Required Notice of Rights in Custody Evaluations)*

(a) Mandatory Notice; Condition Precedent

Before the commencement of any custody evaluation, parenting coordination process, reunification-related assessment, or court-ordered family evaluation, the court shall provide each parent or legal guardian with a written and oral notice of rights, on the record. No evaluation activity may begin ***until this notice is provided.***

(b) Required Contents of Notice The notice shall advise each parent or legal guardian of the following:

(1) Purpose and Limited Role

You are the subject of a court-ordered custody evaluation.

The purpose of the evaluation is to assist the court in determining the best interests and safety of the child.

The evaluator is not a treating therapist, advocate, or decision-maker and does not represent any party.

(2) Neutrality and Qualifications

The evaluator must be neutral, objective, and impartial and may not advocate for any parent or the child.

The evaluator must meet statutory training requirements and expert-evidence standards applicable in custody proceedings.

(3) Scope of the Evaluation

The evaluation may include interviews, observations, record review, and collateral contacts.

No recommendation may be made regarding a parent who has not been evaluated, absent consultation with another qualified neutral professional.

(4) Informed Consent and Use of Information

Participation constitutes informed consent, meaning:

- Information obtained may be used in court
- Confidentiality is limited
- You have the right to understand the evaluator's role, methods, and limitations

(5) Right to Object and Seek Court Review

You have the right to:

- Object on the record to bias, conflicts of interest, lack of qualifications, or procedural irregularities
- Object to recommendations lacking adequate evaluation or evidentiary basis
- Request clarification of methods or conclusions
- Seek court review if the evaluation deviates from statutory or professional standards

(6) Limits on Evaluator Authority

The evaluator may not:

- Engage in ex parte communications with the court on the merits
- Pressure a child to express a custodial preference
- Withhold information relied upon in forming conclusions
- Exceed the scope of the court's order

(7) Child Safety Standard

The evaluation must consider the physical, psychological, and emotional safety of the child, including exposure to coercive control, psychological maltreatment, or interference with parent-child relationships.

(8) Remedies for Noncompliance

If the evaluation fails to comply with law or professional standards, you may:

- File a written objection or motion to strike all or part of the evaluation
- Request limitation on its use
- Request a corrective evaluation or replacement evaluator
- Seek any other relief necessary to protect due process and child safety

(c) Removal or Resignation of Evaluator

Consistent with court rules governing custody evaluations:

- The court may remove an evaluator for good cause
- An evaluator may resign only upon good cause, notice to the parties, an opportunity to be heard, and court approval
- Parents may raise concerns supporting removal or disqualification at any stage upon discovery

(d) Acknowledgment

Each parent or legal guardian shall sign a written acknowledgment confirming receipt and understanding of this notice.

The acknowledgment shall be filed with the court.

Failure to obtain acknowledgment creates a rebuttable presumption that informed consent was not obtained.

(e) Effect of Failure to Provide Notice

Failure to provide this notice prior to commencement of the evaluation may constitute grounds for:

- Exclusion or limitation of the evaluation
- Disqualification of the evaluator
- Remedial orders necessary to prevent prejudice and protect due process

This proposal is consistent with nationally recognized custody evaluation standards emphasizing informed consent, transparency, and evaluator neutrality.

Association of Family and Conciliated Courts (AFCC) Guidelines for Parenting Plan Evaluations in Family Law Cases

<https://www.afccnet.org/Portals/0/PDF/Guidelines%20for%20Parenting%20Plan%20Evaluations%20in%20Family%20Law.pdf?ver=TdRIBVhq6scPHg4WC8ZQSg%3d%3d>

CHILD CUSTODY EVALUATION STANDARDS Published by AMERICAN ACADEMY OF MATRIMONIAL LAWYERS(AAML)

https://aaml.org/wp-content/uploads/MAT201_3.pdf

Deconstructing Custody Evaluation Reports Published by AMERICAN ACADEMY OF MATRIMONIAL LAWYERS(AAML)

https://aaml.org/wp-content/uploads/MAT210_2.pdf

The Supreme Court of Ohio Custody Evaluation Toolkit. <https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/docs/JCS/courtSvcs/resources/CustodyEvaluatorToolkit.pdf>

Administrative Orders of Delaware County Common Pleas Court https://www.delcopa.gov/sites/default/files/2025-08/AdministrativeOrder_82525_Rule1915.11-1ParentingCoordination.pdf

SB222-HB137 FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS.pdf

Uploaded by: Yaakov aichenbaum

Position: FWA



SB222 / HB137
Family Law - Child Custody Evaluators –
Qualifications
FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS

To the Honorable Senators of the JPR and House Judiciary Committees:

SB222/HB137 is the fifth attempt to pass a custody evaluator training bill. Many of the pervasive issues of previous versions have been eliminated. The current bill is essentially a streamlined version of MD RULE 9-205.3. CUSTODY AND VISITATION-RELATED ASSESSMENTS and does nothing more than add a layer of legislative power to the already existing rule. Unfortunately, this bill also incorporates the internal ambiguities and inconsistencies of RULE 9-205.3 and in the streamlining process omits essential components of RULE 9-205.3.

1. Section (E)(1)(V) page 2 line 26 states that:

A CUSTODY EVALUATOR MUST BE:

(V) 1. A MARYLAND–LICENSED GRADUATE OR MASTER SOCIAL WORKER WITH AT LEAST 2 YEARS OF EXPERIENCE IN:

A. ONE OR MORE OF THE AREAS LISTED IN SUBSECTION (F)(4) OF THIS SECTION;

B. CONDUCTING CUSTODY EVALUATIONS

C. ANY COMBINATION OF THE EXPERIENCE DESCRIBED IN ITEM A OR B OF THIS ITEM

Item C. is ambiguous. Items A and B seem to say that an evaluator must have two complete years' experience in one of the areas in subsection (F)(4) **and** two complete years' experience conducting evaluations. Item C. then says it can be a combination of the experience of items A or B. Does that mean that the evaluator does not need two complete years of experience as an evaluator; rather he can have a week's experience in evaluations and have one year and 51 weeks' experience in disability related issues (one of the subsections in (F)(4)?

Also, item B. lacks an operational definition. For example, if an evaluator conducted two evaluations in 2024 and two in 2025, does that constitute two years' experience conducting evaluations? Likewise, Section (F)(3) & (F)(4) (page 3 lines 17-20) require **EXPERIENCE IN CONDUCTING OR OBSERVING CUSTODY EVALUATIONS**, but *experience* is not defined. The American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers Child Custody Evaluation Standards suggests that:

Custody evaluators who have fewer than three years' experience in conducting custody evaluations and have conducted fewer than 20 custody evaluations should seek ongoing supervision from an experienced custody evaluator prior to offering to perform or accepting appointments to conduct custody evaluations.

Needed amendment: The intent of item C. needs to be clarified and the definition of experience should be operationalized to be more in line with the American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers Standards.

2. Item A. requires that a Maryland–licensed graduate or master social worker have experience in **ONE OR MORE OF THE AREAS LISTED IN SUBSECTION (F)(4) OF THIS SECTION**. However, Section (F)(4) (page 3 line 11, 19-27) states that **A CUSTODY EVALUATOR MUST HAVE:**
(4) DEMONSTRATED KNOWLEDGE OF AND EXPERIENCE IN THE FOLLOWING TOPICS:

SB222 / HB137
Family Law - Child Custody Evaluators – Qualifications
FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS

- (I) DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE;**
- (II) CHILD NEGLECT AND ABUSE, INCLUDING SEXUAL ABUSE;**
- (III) CHILD AND ADULT DEVELOPMENT;**
- (IV) TRAUMA AND ITS IMPACT ON CHILDREN AND ADULTS;**
- (V) FAMILY DYNAMICS AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION;**
- (VI) DISABILITY-RELATED ISSUES; AND**
- (VII) THE IMPACT OF DIVORCE AND SEPARATION ON CHILDREN AND ADULTS.**

This implies that **all** evaluators must have knowledge and experience in **all** of these areas. It seems that a Maryland-licensed graduate or master social worker requires less knowledge and experience than all other evaluators. Child custody cases can be exceedingly complex. It is reckless to allow an evaluator who lacks knowledge in most of these areas to conduct an evaluation. For example, if the person has no experience except for disability issues, what qualifications do they have to assess family dynamics?

Needed amendment: All evaluators should be required to have knowledge and experience in all of these areas.

3. The above list is also incomplete. A significant percentage of cases where evaluations are ordered concern allegations of abuse, alienation, and contact refusal issues. The American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers Child Custody Evaluation Standards, the APA Child Custody Evaluator Guidelines and the AFCC and NCJFCJ Joint Statement on Parent-Child Contact Problems all stress the importance of expertise in contact refusal issues including alienation; false allegations; and psychological and emotional abuse. These organizations are referenced and approved of on the Judiciary's website and their training courses are approved.

These issues are so pervasive that all evaluators should be trained in these issues. It is negligent to ignore these issues and thereby compromise child safety. Likewise, the APA and AAML have exhaustive guidelines of the areas of needed evaluator competence that are absent from this bill and the court rules (see https://aaml.org/wp-content/uploads/MAT201_3.pdf and <https://www.apa.org/about/policy/child-custody-evaluations.pdf>).

Needed amendment: Contact refusal issues including alienation, false allegations, and psychological and emotional abuse should be added to the required list. An evaluator who lacks knowledge and experience in these areas by definition should be disqualified from such a case or be required to consult with other experts to develop information that is beyond the scope of the evaluator's practice or area of expertise.

4. Section (F)(1) (page 3 lines 13-14) requires that an evaluator has **COMPLETED A TRAINING PROGRAM THAT CONFORMS TO GUIDELINES ESTABLISHED BY THE ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE OF THE COURTS**. The court itself conducts such training programs. The actual content of the court's training programs and the affiliations of the instructors is not public knowledge. In fact, court Rule 16-913(e) prohibits sharing this knowledge with the public: **(e) Educational and Training Materials. A custodian shall deny inspection of judicial records prepared by, for, or on behalf of a unit of the**

SB222 / HB137
Family Law - Child Custody Evaluators – Qualifications
FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS

Maryland Judiciary for use in the education and training of Maryland judges, magistrates, clerks, and other judicial personnel.

Therefore, there is a lack of transparency concerning the actual implementation of training programs. This is concerning since special interest groups with biased agendas offer training that is not consistent with the guidelines of the APA, AMAL, and AFCC.

Needed amendment: The actual content and instructors of court training programs need to be transparent and monitored for the interference of biased agenda groups.

5. Section (C) (page 2 lines 4-6) states that **A COURT MAY NOT ORDER THE COST OF AN ASSESSMENT TO BE PAID, IN WHOLE OR IN PART, BY A PARTY WITHOUT GIVING THE PARTIES NOTICE AND AN OPPORTUNITY TO OBJECT.** In Section (h)(1) of the court rules it says: **Removal. The court may remove a person appointed or approved to conduct an assessment upon a showing of good cause.** Just like it is ethical to inform parties concerning their right to object to fees, there is also a need to inform parties concerning their right to request the removal of an appointed evaluator or his conclusions upon showing good cause.

Needed amendment: A section should be added that requires that the court inform parties of their right to request the removal of an evaluator or his conclusions upon a showing of good cause.

With these amendments in place, SB222 and HB137 will greatly enhance the standard of MD custody evaluators and ensure that they will possess the knowledge to address all issues. Thank you for your consideration of these important amendments.

Yours,

Yaakov Aichenbaum

Professional Alliance for Child Centered Safety (PACCS), Founding Member of the Board of Directors

<https://www.paccs.global/about-paccs>

yaakov@ybm.edu

6211 Park Heights Avenue

Baltimore, MD 21215

OPD Testimony SB222 Child Custody Evaluators.pdf

Uploaded by: Maria Nenutzka Villamar

Position: UNF



NATASHA M. DARTIGUE
PUBLIC DEFENDER

KEITH A. LOTRIDGE
DEPUTY PUBLIC DEFENDER

ELIZABETH HILLIARD
CHIEF OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

POSITION ON PROPOSED LEGISLATION

BILL: SB 222 Family Law - Child Custody Evaluators – Qualifications

FROM: Maryland Office of the Public Defender

POSITION: Unfavorable

DATE: 1/16/2026

The Maryland Office of the Public Defender respectfully requests that the Committee issue an unfavorable report on Senate Bill 222. However, the MOPD would have no opposition to the passage of this bill if it (1) explicitly excluded its application to Child In Need of Assistance cases, and/or (2) required child custody evaluators to have skills, training, and knowledge of the effects on families of separating children from their parents for placement in foster care. Senate Bill 222 codifies the qualifications certain professionals must possess in order to be appointed or approved by the court as custody evaluators, and authorizes the court on its own initiative or at the request of a party to order an assessment to aid the court in evaluating, among other things, the “best interests of a child in a contested custody or visitation case.”

The glaring issue with SB 222 is its effect on parties involved in Child In Need of Assistance (CINA) cases, which are governed by Courts and Judicial Proceedings Title 3 Subtitle 8. Although CINA cases are governed by a separate and distinct statute, the statutes in the Family Law Article have been applied to CINA proceedings because all CINA proceedings involve issues of custody and visitation. Therefore, Family Law § 9-101.1 has been applied to CINA cases, and so will SB 222 (proposed as Family Law 9-109) if it is passed. That means that in every CINA case – which by definition involves

issues of abuse and neglect of the child – the juvenile court may appoint a third party to determine what is in the best interest of the child, even though in a case involving the government taking away children from their families, it is supposed to be the court which determines what is in the child’s best interests.

Additionally, if SB 222 applies to CINA cases, the experts should be trained, experienced, and knowledgeable about the harm caused by family separation and involvement in the foster care system. The present language of the bill does not require that.

Finally, SB 222 authorizes a court to order the cost of an assessment to be paid in whole or in part by a party but must give the parties notice and an opportunity to object. This provision potentially adds another hearing to be placed on the docket. CINA cases already involve at least six hearings at which there must be an attorney from the Department of Social Services, attorney for the child or children, and an attorney for each parent. Nearly 98% of all parents in CINA cases are represented by the MOPD, which means they are poor and likely cannot afford to pay for the assessment. The children are also represented by state appointed counsel. In other words, a hearing would have to be held to determine who will bear the cost of the assessment, and the costs would likely fall on either the court or the Department of Social Services. The MOPD sees approximately 1,300 new CINA cases every year statewide. The number of additional hearings that would have to be docketed in court could potentially increase by at least 1,000. Maryland is already out of compliance with the timelines established by law to resolve CINA cases, and adding another hearing will only worsen that problem.

If SB 222 explicitly excluded application to CINA cases, these concerns would cease to exist and the MOPD would not have any opposition to the proposed provisions.

For these reasons, the Maryland Office of the Public Defender urges this Committee to issue an unfavorable report on Senate Bill 222.

Submitted by: Maryland Office of the Public Defender, Government Relations Division.

Authored by: Nena C. Villamar, Chief of Parental Defense Division,

nenavillamar@maryland.gov, 410-458-8857.

2026 01 15, SB 222_FLSC_Unfav.pdf

Uploaded by: Michelle Smith

Position: UNF

To: Members of The Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

From: Family Law Section Council (FLSC)

Date: January 16, 2026

Subject: Senate Bill 222:
Family Law- Child Custody Evaluators-Qualifications

Position: UNFAVORABLE

The Maryland State Bar Association (MSBA) FLSC **opposes Senate Bill 222.**

This testimony is submitted on behalf of the Family Law Section Council (“FLSC”) of the Maryland State Bar Association (“MSBA”). The FLSC is the formal representative of the Family and Law Section of the MSBA, which promotes the objectives of the MSBA by improving the administration of justice in the field of family law and, at the same time, tries to bring together the members of the MSBA who are concerned with family laws and in reforms and improvements in such laws through legislation or otherwise. The FLSC is charged with the general supervision and control of the affairs of the Section and authorized to act for the Section in any way in which the Section itself could act. The Section has over 1,100 attorney members.

The FLSC is aware that the sponsors of SB 222 collaborated with Judiciary representatives to amend Maryland Rule 9-205.3 (Custody and Visitation-Related Assessments). The FLSC believes this outcome should be sufficient to bring the several years of proposed iterations of this bill to a successful conclusion.

The FLSC believes that the important aspects of SB 222 have been incorporated into the Maryland Rule that Judges, attorneys and litigants use when requesting and ordering child custody evaluations. The required education and mandatory topics of training for the custody evaluators are clearly enumerated in the Rule. In addition, the Rule includes the appropriate “grandfather” clause to include a waiver option for those evaluators who meet the qualifications through sufficient training and experience instead of licensure. Maryland Rule 9-205.3 has the force of law¹ and obviates the need for a separate statute as proposed by SB 222.

¹ In *Johnson v. Swann*, 314 Md. 285, 289-90, 550 A.2d 703 (1988), the Court of Appeals explained:

In fact, the FLSC is concerned that the enactment of a separate statute which overlaps Rule 9-205.3 would lead to confusion and may lead to an inconsistent application of the two laws over the ensuing years. Moreover, any amendments or revisions made in the future to the Rule and/or statute may cause increased conflict in interpretation by litigants, counsel, trial Judges and Appellate Justices. For example, any future revisions to the statute regarding the topics of knowledge and experience required for the evaluators would require proponents to successfully navigate the legislative process. Whereas revisions to the Rule require a less arduous process as the Rules committee meets throughout the year and the process is open and more accessible to the public. The appropriate training and experience required of custody evaluators is within the purview of court administration and that process should be elastic and one which can be easily addressed by the Judiciary and stakeholders in the Rules process. Maryland Rule 9-205.3 does just that; thus, a separate statute is unnecessary.

For the reason(s) stated above, the MSBA FLSC **opposes Senate Bill 222 and urges an unfavorable committee report.**

Should you have any questions, please contact Michelle Smith at 410-280-1700 or msmith@lawannapolis.com.

Section 18 of Article IV of the **Maryland** Constitution expressly grants to this Court the authority to adopt "**rules** and regulations concerning the practice [*17] and procedure in and the administration of the appellate courts and in the other courts of this state," and provides that **rules** so adopted "shall have the **force of law**." See *Montgomery County v. McNeece*, 311 Md. 194, 206, 533 A.2d 671 (1987); *Hill v. State*, 218 Md. 120, 127, 145 A.2d 445 (1958). Under this section, the legislature may rescind, change, or modify a **rule** promulgated by the Court of Appeals. *Funger v. Mayor of Somerset*, 244 Md. 141, 150, 223 A.2d 168 (1966). The **Maryland Rules** of Procedure generally apply despite a prior statute to the contrary and until a subsequent statute would repeal or modify the **rule**. See *County Fed. S. & L. Ass'n v. Equitable S. & L. Ass'n*, 261 Md. 246, 253, 274 A.2d 363 (1971).

[In re Selby, 2019 Md. App. LEXIS 121, *16-17](#)

MPA Testimony SB 222- Oppose.pdf

Uploaded by: Stephanie Olarte

Position: UNF



OFFICERS OF THE BOARD

President

Stephanie Wolf, JD, Ph.D.

President-Elect

Peter Smith, Psy.D.

Past President

Brian Corrado, Psy.D.

Secretary

Kim Sanschagrin JD, Ph.D.

Treasurer

Andrea Chisolm, Ph.D.

Representatives-at-large

Deborah Williams, Psy.D.

Laurie Donze, Ph.D.

Representative to APA Council

Mary Fernandes, Ph.D.

COMMITTEE CHAIRS

Communications

Beatrice Gerry, Ph.D.

Diversity

Mindy Milstein, Ph.D.

Early Career Psychologist

Danielle Wexler, Ph.D.

Educational Affairs

Shalena Wade, Ph.D.

Ethics

LaShaun Williams, Psy.D.

Legislative

Stephanie Olarte, Ph.D.

Membership

Dana O'Brien, Ph.D.

Past Presidents' Council

Steve Sobelman, Ph.D.

PROFESSIONAL AFFAIRS

OFFICER

Paul C. Berman, Ph.D.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Taylor Dickerson

January 15, 2026

Senator William C. Smith, Jr., Chair
Senator Jeff Waldstreicher, Vice Chair
Judicial Proceedings Committee
Miller Senate Office Building, 2 East
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: SB 222 – Family Law – Child Custody Evaluators – Qualifications and Training
Position: OPPOSE

Dear Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and Members of the Committee:

The Maryland Psychological Association, (MPA), which represents over 1,000 doctoral level psychologists throughout the state, asks the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee to **report unfavorably on SB 222**.

The MPA recognizes the Committee's goal is to develop the qualifications and training necessary for mental health professionals who are appointed by the Courts to be custody evaluators in Maryland. We understand and appreciate the meaningful role mental health professionals have in these complex cases and the significant impact these evaluations can have on vulnerable youngsters in Maryland. We support your goal of ensuring that professionals involved in these evaluations have appropriate education and training including specialized knowledge in child development, family systems, intimate partner violence, child maltreatment, prevention of maltreatment, parenting, parent-child relationships, and family law, among others.

The MPA, however, is concerned that while the intent and goal of SB 222 is consistent with ensuring the professionals have specialized competence, the bill is unnecessary and duplicative because these education and training requirements overlap and are consistent with Maryland Rule 9-205.3 which has the power of law (Section 18 of Article IV of the Maryland Constitution). In addition, The Code of Maryland Regulations (COMAR) also contains specific requirements governing the professional conduct of licensed psychologists who perform child custody evaluations or who otherwise render an opinion on legal or physical custody, including standards related to the competence necessary to conduct child custody evaluations (see COMAR 10.36.09.00-05). Finally, professional guidelines and standards promulgated by the American Psychological Association (APA), the Association of Family and Conciliation Courts (AFCC), and other professional disciplines also set rigorous education and training requirements for custody evaluators that are even more comprehensive and wide-ranging.



Furthermore, when overlapping and duplicative education and training requirements are found in different laws (Maryland Rule 9-205.3) and statutes, the result is likely confusion for the public, the profession, and the legal community.

The MPA applauds the Committee for its ongoing willingness to collaborate with the various stakeholders on this important issue and supports the Committee's concern for children and families. But because rigorous education and training standards already exist in Maryland Rule, Maryland regulations, and professional standards and guidelines, **the Maryland Psychological Association opposes SB 222 and urges an unfavorable Committee Report.**

If we can be of any further assistance as the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee considers this bill, please do not hesitate to contact MPA's Legislative Chair, Dr. Stephanie Olarte, Ph.D. at mpalegislativcommittee@gmail.com.

Respectfully submitted,

Respectfully submitted,

Stephanie Wolf, JD, Ph.D.
Stephanie Wolf, JD, Ph.D.
President

Stephanie Olarte, Ph.D.
Stephanie Olarte, Ph.D.
Chair, MPA Legislative Committee

CC: Barbara Brocato & Dan Shattuck, MPA Government Affairs

sb222.pdf

Uploaded by: Will Vormelker

Position: UNF

HON. STACY A. MAYER
CIRCUIT COURT
JUDGE
BALTIMORE COUNTY
CHAIR

HON. RICHARD SANDY
CIRCUIT COURT
JUDGE
FREDERICK COUNTY
VICE-CHAIR



KELLEY O'CONNOR
ASSISTANT STATE COURT
ADMINISTRATOR
GOVERNMENT RELATIONS
AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS
P: (410) 260-1560

SUZANNE PELZ, ESQ.
SNR. GOVT. RELATIONS AND
PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICER
P: (410)260-1523

MARYLAND JUDICIAL COUNCIL LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE

MEMORANDUM

TO: Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
FROM: Legislative Committee
Suzanne D. Pelz, Esq.
410-260-1523
RE: Senate Bill 222
Family Law – Child Custody Evaluators - Qualifications
DATE: January 16, 2026
(1/20)
POSITION: Oppose

The Judiciary supports the goals of this legislation and appreciates the sponsors' and advocates' willingness to work with the Judiciary to help ensure custody and visitation-related assessments are conducted by qualified and properly trained individuals. Senate Bill 222 seeks to codify language in Maryland Rule 9-205.3 (attached), which the Supreme Court of Maryland amended in 2025 based on recommendations from the bill's sponsors and other relevant stakeholders. The Rule, which is more comprehensive than this bill, has been the practice regarding custody evaluators since 2016. Based on input from stakeholders, social science, and best practices, it has been updated seven times since its original implementation.

The Judiciary's opposition is based on practical concerns. Maryland Rule 9-205.3 has the force of law, which is the goal of the legislation, but can be updated more readily than when codified in statute. The Standing Committee on Rules of Practice and Procedure, which has a deliberative and public process, meets throughout the year and can propose changes on an ongoing basis as best practices develop. Maintaining all applicable requirements in the rule allows the law regarding these assessments to evolve, along with families and trends, in a more efficient and comprehensive manner.

cc. Hon. Mary Beth Carozza
Judicial Council
Legislative Committee
Kelley O'Connor