

Department of Legislative Services  
Maryland General Assembly  
1999 Session

FISCAL NOTE

House Bill 121 (Chairman, Judiciary Committee)  
(Departmental - Human Resources)

Judiciary

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Child Abuse - Investigations

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This departmental bill requires a local department of social services that receives a report of suspected child abuse to immediately notify the appropriate law enforcement agency. The local department of social services and the law enforcement agency must jointly ensure that each report of suspected child abuse is thoroughly investigated and must enter into a written cooperative agreement that specifies standard operating procedures for ensuring that each report is thoroughly investigated.

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Fiscal Summary

**State Effect:** None. The bill's requirements could be handled with existing budgeted resources.

**Local Effect:** Potential increase in expenditures. Revenues would not be affected. **This bill imposes a mandate on a unit of local government.**

**Small Business Effect:** The Department of Human Resources has determined that this bill has minimal or no impact on small business (attached). Legislative Services concurs with this assessment.

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Fiscal Analysis

**Background:** After reviewing a number of cases in which children died or were seriously injured as a result of severe child abuse, grand jurors in Montgomery County and Worcester County recently issued reports calling on Maryland to change the way in which the State currently handles child abuse cases. One of the recommendations of the Worcester County

Grand Jury was for social workers and police officers to conduct joint child abuse investigations.

**Local Expenditures:** Under current law, law enforcement officers are required to jointly investigate reports of sexual abuse only. Four local jurisdictions (Baltimore City, Prince George's, Somerset, and Frederick counties) advise that the bill's requirements could be handled with existing budgeted resources because local law enforcement agencies already comply with the bill's requirements.

However, the bill's provisions would result in additional workload and expenditures in any local jurisdictions that do not already investigate all cases of reported child abuse. Montgomery County advises that expenditures could increase by an estimated \$161,745 in fiscal 2000, which accounts for the bill's October 1, 1999 effective date. This estimate reflects the cost of hiring six additional law enforcement investigators to investigate all reports of child abuse. It includes salaries, fringe benefits, one-time start-up costs, and ongoing operating expenses. Future year expenditures would reflect full salaries, purchase of vehicles, and annual increases in ongoing operating expenses.

**Additional Comments:** In fiscal 1997, 11,800 physical child abuse investigations were conducted by child protective services staff in Maryland.

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**Information Source(s):** Department of Human Resources; Prince George's, Montgomery, Somerset, and Frederick counties; Baltimore City; Department of Legislative Services

**Fiscal Note History:** First Reader - March 1, 1999

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