

**Department of Legislative Services**  
 Maryland General Assembly  
 2013 Session

**FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE**

Senate Bill 94 (Senator Kelley, *et al.*)  
 Judicial Proceedings

**Child Abuse and Neglect - Notice and Reporting Requirements, Disclosure, and Task Force**

This bill makes it a misdemeanor for a worker in a professional capacity who is required to report suspected abuse to knowingly and willfully fail to provide the required report under specified circumstances. The bill establishes immunity from civil liability and criminal penalties for workers who in good faith provide or participate in providing notice of abuse or neglect as required. The bill also establishes the Task Force to Study Training for School Employees and Volunteers on the Prevention, Identification, and Reporting of Child Sexual Abuse.

The provisions of the bill establishing the task force take effect June 1, 2013, and terminate May 31, 2014. Otherwise, the bill takes effect October 1, 2013.

**Fiscal Summary**

**State Effect:** General fund expenditures increase by \$18,400 in FY 2014, which reflects the cost of hiring one part-time contractual employee within the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) to staff the task force and produce the required report. Reimbursements for task force members can be handled with existing resources. The bill’s penalty provisions are not expected to materially impact State finances.

(in dollars)	FY 2014	FY 2015	FY 2016	FY 2017	FY 2018
Revenues	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
GF Expenditure	18,400	0	0	0	0
Net Effect	(\$18,400)	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0

*Note:() = decrease; GF = general funds; FF = federal funds; SF = special funds; - = indeterminate effect*

**Local Effect:** The bill’s penalty provisions are not expected to materially impact local finances.

**Small Business Effect:** None.

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## **Analysis**

**Bill Summary:** A worker required to file a report under existing law may not knowingly and willfully fail to file a required report of abuse if the individual has actual and direct knowledge of the abuse and knows or should have known that the abuse is likely to cause or has caused serious physical injury or death to a child or the individual has actual and direct knowledge that there has been a violation of specified crimes in which the victim is a child. The crimes specified are a first or second degree rape, a first or second degree sexual offense, or sexual abuse of a minor. A violator is guilty of a misdemeanor and on conviction is subject to maximum penalties of one year imprisonment and/or a \$10,000 fine.

The bill exempts a medical examiner from making an oral or written report within specified timeframes. Instead, the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner is required to send a copy of the autopsy report to the appropriate authorities if the office finds that the death of a child was caused by or related to abuse or neglect.

Any public or private entity that employs or contracts with a person who is required to report abuse or neglect due to his or her professional capacity is required to (1) have a policy requiring compliance with all laws and regulations regarding child abuse and neglect and (2) provide employees and contractors with information regarding how to report child abuse and neglect.

A person is authorized, under the bill, to disclose a report or record concerning child abuse or neglect to the president of an institution of higher education or the Chancellor of the University System of Maryland to carry out appropriate personnel or administrative action following a report of suspected child abuse committed (1) by a current employee; (2) by a contractor, employee of a contractor, or volunteer of the institution who has on-campus contact with children; (3) in connection with a program, camp, or other activity that is sponsored, recognized, or approved by the institution; or (4) on institution property.

### *Task Force Establishment*

The bill also establishes the Task Force to Study Training for School Employees and Volunteers on the Prevention, Identification, and Reporting of Child Sexual Abuse. The Governor is to designate the chair of the task force, which is to be staffed by MSDE. The task force is required to study (1) current practices and resources used by local school systems to train employees and volunteers on the prevention, identification, and

reporting of child sexual abuse; (2) nationally recognized model programs for training professional school employees on the prevention, identification, and reporting of child sexual abuse; (3) the current child sexual abuse prevention curriculum in schools; and (4) the resources currently available in the State for the prevention, identification, and reporting of child sexual abuse, including resources available through sexual assault programs, child advocacy centers, and nonprofit organizations.

The task force is also required to make recommendations regarding (1) whether training on child sexual abuse should be incorporated into broader training on all child abuse and neglect, should be addressed separately, or both; (2) whether certain school-based employees, including guidance counselors and psychologists, should receive additional training on the identification and reporting of child sexual abuse; (3) whether an age-appropriate statewide child sexual abuse curriculum is advisable for elementary school students; and (4) the best practices for training school employees and volunteers on the prevention, identification, and reporting of child sexual abuse.

The task force must report its findings and recommendations on the best practices for training school employees and volunteers on the prevention, identification, and reporting of child sexual abuse to the Governor and specified committees of the General Assembly by December 1, 2013.

## **Current Law:**

### *Penalties for Failure to Report*

State law does not criminalize the failure of a worker to report suspected abuse or neglect. The licensing boards for some workers who are mandated to report child abuse and neglect (nurses, doctors, and social workers are examples) are authorized to impose sanctions on licensees for failing to report.

### *Mandatory Reporters*

Health care practitioners, police officers, educators, and human service workers who are acting in a professional capacity, and who have reason to believe that a child has been subjected to abuse or neglect, must notify the local department of social services or the appropriate law enforcement agency. An “educator or human service worker” includes any teacher, counselor, social worker, caseworker, and parole or probation officer. If the worker is acting as a staff member of a hospital, public health agency, child care institution, juvenile detention center, school, or similar institution, then the individual must also notify the head of the institution or the designee.

A worker who notifies the appropriate authorities must make an oral report by telephone or direct communication as soon as possible to the local department or the appropriate law enforcement agency if the worker has reason to believe the child has been subjected to abuse or neglect. A written report to the local department is required not later than 48 hours after the contact, examination, or treatment that caused the worker to believe that the child had been subjected to abuse or neglect. A copy of the written report must be provided to the local State's Attorney. An agency that receives an oral report of suspected abuse or neglect must immediately notify the other agency.

As far as reasonably possible, a worker who makes a report must include the name, age, and home address of the child; the name and home address of the child's parent or other person responsible for the child's care; the whereabouts of the child; and the nature and extent of the child abuse or neglect. The report must include any available evidence about previous instances of abuse or neglect and any information that would help to determine the cause of the suspected abuse or neglect and the identity of any person responsible for the abuse or neglect.

In general, a person other than a health care practitioner, police officer, educator, or human service worker who has reason to believe that a child has been subjected to abuse or neglect must notify the local department of social services or the appropriate law enforcement agency. Attorneys and clergy are generally exempt from reporting if they become aware of suspected abuse or neglect through privileged communications, as specified in statute. Individuals (other than those who are required to report because of their professional capacity) who in good faith make or participate in making a report of abuse or neglect or participate in an investigation or resulting judicial proceeding are immune from civil liability or criminal penalties.

## **Background:**

### *Mandatory Reporters*

According to the Child Welfare Information Gateway, every state and the District of Columbia have laws that identify those people who are required to report suspected incidences of child abuse and neglect. As of August 2012, 48 states and the District of Columbia specify professions for which the mandatory reporting requirements apply. Typically, mandated reporters include school personnel, social workers, health care workers, child care providers, medical examiners or coroners, and law enforcement officers. The other two states, New Jersey and Wyoming, do not specify professional workers who are required to report, but require all persons to report suspected child abuse or neglect. At least four states (Louisiana, Oregon, Virginia, and Washington) designate as mandatory reporters faculty, administrators, athletics staff, and other employees and volunteers at institutions of higher learning, including public and private colleges and universities and vocational and technical schools.

At least 18 states, including Maryland, require all citizens to report suspected abuse or neglect regardless of profession. In Maryland, however, the reporting requirements for a citizen are less stringent than the reporting requirements for covered professionals.

### *Failure to Report Penalties*

According to the Child Welfare Information Gateway, as of 2009 (the latest information readily available), 47 states and the District of Columbia impose penalties on mandatory reporters who knowingly or willfully fail to report suspected child abuse or neglect. The states that do not impose a penalty, in addition to Maryland, are North Carolina and Wyoming.

In 39 of the 47 states that impose penalties, the penalty is a misdemeanor. The eight states that do not use the misdemeanor classification for the failure to report penalty are Connecticut, Delaware, Massachusetts, Mississippi, New Jersey, Vermont, Virginia, and Wisconsin. In Arizona, Florida, and Minnesota, misdemeanors become felonies for the failure to report serious or life-threatening situations. In Illinois, a second conviction for failure to report is a felony.

A mandated reporter who fails to report can face jail terms ranging from 10 days to five years and/or fines ranging from \$100 to \$5,000. In Arkansas, Colorado, Iowa, Michigan, Montana, New York, and Rhode Island, mandatory reporters who fail to report face civil liability for any damages arising from that failure as well as criminal penalties.

### *Training of School Employees*

It is estimated that one in four girls and one in six boys will have experienced an episode of sexual abuse while younger than 18 years. Many sexually abused children exhibit physical and behavioral symptoms. *Practical Strategies for School Counselors* developed by MSDE lists some of these indicators of sexual abuse.

MSDE reports that because educators are required to report child abuse and neglect under the Family Law Article, all local school systems provide training to all school personnel on child abuse and neglect policies and procedures. According to statute, child abuse specifically includes sexual abuse. The training also includes symptoms of child abuse and neglect as well as the related programs and services available. As part of the curriculum, local school systems also have a child abuse and neglect awareness and prevention education program for all students.

**State Expenditures:** General fund expenditures increase by \$18,400 in fiscal 2014 which reflects a 30-day start-up delay and the bill's June 1, 2013 effective date. This estimate reflects the cost of hiring one part-time (50%) contractual employee within MSDE to staff the task force and produce the required report. It includes a part-time salary, fringe benefits, one-time start-up costs, ongoing operating expenses, and assumes termination of the contractual employee on December 31, 2013. This estimate assumes that MSDE will absorb any additional expenditures related to reimbursements for the task force members and the preparation and distribution of materials to be used during task force meetings.

Contractual Position	0.5
Salary and Fringe Benefits	\$13,658
Operating Expenses and Start-up Costs	<u>4,759</u>
<b>Total FY 2014 State Expenditures</b>	<b>\$18,417</b>

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### **Additional Information**

**Prior Introductions:** SB 63 of 2012, as amended by the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee, is substantially similar. It passed the Senate, but no further action was taken. Numerous other bills introduced in 2012 (SB 140, HB 496, HB 999, and HB 1067) also would have criminalized the failure to report child abuse or neglect in varying ways; one House bill received an unfavorable report from the House Judiciary Committee, while others received no action after being heard.

**Cross File:** None.

**Information Source(s):** Department of Human Resources, Maryland State Department of Education, Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, Judiciary (Administrative Office of the Courts), Department of Juvenile Services, Department of State Police, Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services, University System of Maryland, Howard and Montgomery counties, Baltimore City, Child Welfare Information Gateway, Department of Legislative Services

**Fiscal Note History:** First Reader - January 28, 2013  
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