

Department of Legislative Services  
Maryland General Assembly  
2019 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE  
Third Reader - Revised

House Bill 1252  
Judiciary

(Delegate McComas, *et al.*)

Judicial Proceedings

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**Child Abuse and Neglect - Training of Health Care Professionals**

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This bill requires the Maryland Department of Health to provide each health occupation board that is authorized under current law to take action against an applicant, licensee, certificate holder, registrant, or permit holder who knowingly fails to report suspected child abuse, as required by current law, with a list of generally recommended courses on the obligation to report abuse and neglect and the identification of abused and neglected children. Each board must (1) post the information required for a prospective student to enroll for one or more of the recommended courses prominently on the board's website; (2) provide information about the courses to specified health care professionals at the time of license renewal; or (3) advertise the availability of the recommended courses in the newsletters and any other media published by the board. These provisions do not apply to a board that requires applicants, licensees, certificate holders, registrants, or permit holders to obtain continuing education on the identification and reporting of abused and neglected children.

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**Fiscal Summary**

**State Effect:** It is anticipated that the bill's requirements can be met with existing resources.

**Local Effect:** None.

**Small Business Effect:** Minimal.

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## Analysis

### **Current Law:**

#### *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 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, 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.

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, physicians, and social workers are examples) are authorized to discipline workers for failing to report.

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 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.

### *Child Abuse and Neglect Investigations*

After receiving a report of suspected abuse or neglect of a child who lives in Maryland that is alleged to have occurred in the State, the local department of social services and/or the appropriate law enforcement agency must promptly investigate the report to protect the health, safety, and welfare of the child or children. Within 24 hours after receiving a report of suspected physical or sexual child abuse, and within five days after receiving a report of suspected child neglect or mental injury, the local department or law enforcement agency must (1) see the child; (2) attempt to have an on-site interview with the child's caretaker; (3) decide on the safety of the child and of other children in the household; and (4) decide on the safety of the other children in the care or custody of the alleged abuser. The determinations and assessments that are required during an abuse or neglect investigation are specified in statute.

The local State's Attorney must assist in a child abuse or neglect investigation if requested to do so by a local department of social services. The local departments, appropriate law enforcement agencies, the State's Attorneys in the counties and Baltimore City, and the local health officers must enter into a written agreement pertaining to standard operating procedures for investigations of suspected abuse or neglect. A joint investigation procedure must be implemented for conducting investigations of sexual abuse, which must include techniques for expediting validation of sexual abuse complaints and other techniques to decrease trauma to the child.

To the extent possible, a child abuse or neglect investigation must be completed within 10 days after receiving the notice of the suspected abuse or neglect. Within 10 days after receiving the first notice of suspected abuse or neglect of a child, the local department of social services or law enforcement agency must report the preliminary investigation findings to the local State's Attorney. Within 5 business days after the investigation is completed, the local department and the law enforcement agency, if the law enforcement agency participated in the investigation, must make a complete written report of findings to the local State's Attorney.

**Background:** For additional information regarding child abuse and neglect, please see the **Appendix – Child Abuse and Neglect.**

## **Additional Information**

**Prior Introductions:** HB 600 of 2018, a similar bill, passed the House as amended and was referred to the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee, but no further action was taken.

**Cross File:** None.

**Information Source(s):** Judiciary (Administrative Office of the Courts); Maryland Department of Health; Department of Human Services; Child Welfare Information Gateway; National Conference of State Legislatures; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; Department of Legislative Services

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## **Appendix – Child Abuse and Neglect**

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### **The Epidemic of Child Abuse and Neglect**

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the National Survey of Children’s Exposure to Violence, 25% of children have experienced abuse or neglect during their lifetimes. Child abuse and neglect is considered by experts to be an adverse childhood experience that may impact lifelong health and well-being. For example, adverse childhood experiences have been shown to increase the chances of risky behaviors, chronic health conditions, financial stress, and poor academic achievement, among other outcomes. A recent report from the National Conference of State Legislatures also notes the CDC’s specific finding that in addition to the physical injuries or emotional and psychological issues that can manifest in the immediate aftermath, childhood violence increases the risk for heart disease, cancer, and obesity, as well as problems with brain development, social skills, and language abilities. Children who have experienced abuse and neglect are also at higher risk of experiencing other forms of violence.

### **Child Abuse and Neglect in Maryland**

The Department of Human Services (DHS) advises that in fiscal 2018, there were 5,308 indicated reports (a finding of credible evidence which has not been satisfactorily refuted) of child abuse, neglect, and mental injury in the State. In addition, 10,757 reports were ruled out and 3,598 reports were unsubstantiated (insufficient evidence to support a finding of “ruled out” or “indicated”). Of the reports for which an indicated finding was made, 733 were for physical abuse, 1,204 were for sexual abuse, 3,365 were for neglect, and 6 were for mental injury. Also in fiscal 2018, DHS referred 8,624 cases for alternative response, which is a process available in specified circumstances that does not include an investigation or a formal determination as to whether abuse or neglect occurred.

### **Mandatory Reporters**

According to the Child Welfare Information Gateway (CWIG), 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 2015 (the latest information available), 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 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.

The Commission to Eliminate Child Abuse and Neglect Fatalities, a national commission created by federal legislation in 2013, noted in its final report that a review of most fatality cases reveals that the children and families were known to someone who was in a position to help, such as medical personnel, neighbors, and mental health and substance abuse treatment providers. However, the report also indicated that professionals who are mandatory reporters have varying levels of knowledge and information about reporting. It cited one study with findings that clinicians did not report at least 25% of injuries considered likely to be due to child abuse and 75% of injuries possibly caused by child abuse. Demanding greater accountability from mandatory reporters was one recommendation cited in the commission's report.

### **Failure to Report Penalties in Other States**

According to CWIG, as of August 2015, 48 states and the District of Columbia impose penalties on mandatory reporters who knowingly or willfully fail to report suspected child abuse or neglect. The only other state that does not impose a penalty, in addition to Maryland, is Wyoming.

In 40 of the 48 states that impose penalties, the penalty is specified as a misdemeanor. In Arizona and Minnesota, misdemeanors are upgraded to felonies for failure to report more serious situations, while in Connecticut, Illinois, and Kentucky, second or subsequent violations are classified as felonies.

A mandated reporter who fails to report can face jail terms ranging from 30 days to five years and/or fines ranging from \$300 to \$10,000. In California and Massachusetts, harsher penalties are imposed when the failure to report results in the child's death or serious bodily injury. Louisiana imposes harsher penalties when the reporter fails to report sexual abuse or serious bodily injury. Delaware and Virginia impose harsher penalties upon second or subsequent convictions for failure to report. Vermont imposes its fine for failure to report when the reporter willfully failed to report with the intent to conceal the abuse. West Virginia imposes harsher penalties for the failure to report the sexual assault of a child.