

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2020 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
First Reader

Senate Bill 482 (Senator Lee)
Judicial Proceedings

Criminal Procedure - Out of Court Statements of Child Victims - Child Neglect

This bill expands statutory evidentiary provisions that authorize the admission of an out of court statement in a juvenile court or criminal proceeding made by a child victim under specified circumstances to include statements made by an alleged victim of the crime of child neglect.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: The bill is not anticipated to materially affect the workload or finances of the Judiciary or the Office of the Public Defender.

Local Effect: The bill is not anticipated to materially affect the workload or finances of the circuit courts or State's Attorneys' offices.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Bill Summary: The bill authorizes the court to admit into evidence in a juvenile court proceeding or in a criminal proceeding an out of court statement to prove the truth of the matter asserted in the statement made by a child victim who (1) is younger than age 13 and (2) is the alleged victim or the child alleged to need assistance in the case before the court concerning the crime of child neglect.

Current Law:

Admissibility of Out of Court Statements Made by Child Victims

A court is authorized to admit into evidence in a juvenile court proceeding or in a criminal proceeding an out of court statement to prove the truth of the matter asserted in the statement made by a child victim who (1) is younger than age 13 and (2) is the alleged victim or the child alleged to need assistance in the case before the court concerning:

- child abuse or sexual abuse of a minor;
- first- or second-degree rape or a third-degree sexual offense;
- attempted rape in the first or second degree; or
- abuse or neglect in a juvenile court proceeding.

“Statement” is defined as (1) an oral or written assertion or (2) nonverbal conduct intended as an assertion, including sounds, gestures, demonstrations, drawings, and similar actions. The statutory provisions regarding these statements do not limit the admissibility of a statement under any other applicable hearsay exception or rule of evidence.

An out of court statement made by a child victim may be admissible only if the statement was made to and is offered by specified individuals, including physicians, nurses, teachers, or social workers, while the individual was acting lawfully in the course of his/her profession.

An out of court statement by a child victim may come into evidence in a criminal proceeding or in a juvenile court proceeding other than a child in need of assistance (CINA) proceeding to prove the truth of the matter asserted in the statement if the child victim testifies and if the statement is not admissible under any other hearsay exception. An out of court statement by a child victim may come into evidence in a CINA proceeding to prove the truth of the matter asserted in the statement regardless of whether the child victim testifies and if the statement is not admissible under any other hearsay exception.

If the child victim does not testify, the child victim’s out of court statement is admissible only if there is corroborative evidence that the alleged offender had the opportunity to commit the alleged abuse or neglect.

The prosecuting attorney is required to serve on the defendant, child respondent, or alleged offender and the attorney for the defendant, child respondent, or alleged offender with

notice of (1) the State's intention to introduce the statement and the content of the statement; (2) any audio or visual recording of the statement; and (3) if an audio or visual recording of the statement is not available, the content of the statement. Statutory provisions specify additional requirements regarding notice and depositions.

The out of court statement of a child victim is only admissible if it has particularized guarantees of trustworthiness. To determine the trustworthiness of the statement, the court must consider multiple factors, including (1) the child victim's personal knowledge of the event; (2) the certainty that the statement was made; (3) any apparent motive to fabricate or exhibit partiality by the child victim, including interest, bias, corruption, or coercion; (4) whether the statement was spontaneous or directly responsive to questions; (5) the timing of the statement; (6) whether the child victim's young age makes it unlikely that the child victim fabricated the statement that represents a graphic, detailed account beyond the child victim's expected knowledge and experience; (7) the age appropriateness of the terminology used by the victim in the statement; (8) the nature and duration of the abuse or neglect; (9) the inner consistency and coherence of the statement; (10) whether the child victim was suffering pain or distress when making the statement; (11) whether there is extrinsic evidence to show that the defendant or child respondent had an opportunity to commit the act complained of in the statement; (12) whether the statement was suggested by the use of leading questions; and (13) the credibility of the person testifying about the statement.

The court is required to make a finding on the record regarding the trustworthiness of the statement and determine the admissibility of the statement in a hearing outside of the presence of the jury or before the juvenile court proceeding. The court must examine the child victim in a location not open to the public before making a determination on the admissibility of the statement. The court is not required to conduct this examination if (1) the child victim is deceased; (2) the child victim is absent from the jurisdiction for good cause shown or the State has been unable to procure the child victim's presence by subpoena or other reasonable means; or (3) the court determines that an audio or visual recording of the child victim's statement makes an examination of the child victim unnecessary. When the court conducts this examination, the defendant/child respondent may not be present. However, one attorney for each defendant/child respondent, one attorney for the child victim, and one prosecuting attorney may be present at the examination.

Child Neglect

A parent, family member, household member, or other person who has permanent or temporary care or custody or responsibility for the supervision of a minor may not neglect the minor. "Neglect" is the intentional failure to provide necessary assistance and resources for the physical needs or mental health of a minor that creates a substantial risk of harm to

the minor’s physical health or a substantial risk of mental injury to the minor. Neglect does not include the failure to provide necessary assistance and resources when the failure is due solely to a lack of financial resources or homelessness. A violator is guilty of a misdemeanor and subject to maximum penalties of five years imprisonment and/or a \$5,000 fine. A sentence imposed under this provision must be in addition to any other sentence imposed for a conviction arising from the same facts and circumstances unless the evidence required to prove each crime is substantially identical.

Background: The provision for out of court statements of child victims, sometimes referred to as the “tender years statute,” is a statutory exception to the hearsay rule, which generally prohibits the admission into evidence of an out of court statement offered to prove the truth of the matter asserted in the statement.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Designated Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Maryland State Commission on Criminal Sentencing Policy; Judiciary (Administrative Office of the Courts); Office of the Public Defender; Maryland State’s Attorneys’ Association; Department of Juvenile Services; Department of Legislative Services

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