

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2025 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
Third Reader - Revised

House Bill 1480
Appropriations

(Delegate Cardin, *et al.*)

Judicial Proceedings

**Child Advocacy Centers - Continuity of Care Standards for Health Care
Professionals and Reports of Violations**

This bill requires the standards established by the Maryland Statewide Organization for Child Advocacy Centers to require (1) an individual employed by or contracted with a child advocacy center providing medical or mental health services to be licensed or certified by the appropriate health occupations board, if applicable, and provide services within the scope of the provider's license or certification and (2) each child advocacy center to establish a specified continuity of care plan. Each child advocacy center must report a complaint that is based on the established standards to the Governor's Office of Crime Prevention and Policy (GOCPP) for referral to the Attorney General for investigation and further action, if necessary. By January 1 each year, beginning in 2027, GOCPP must publish specified information on the department's website for the immediately preceding year.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: The bill's requirements can likely be handled with existing budgeted resources, as discussed below. No effect on revenues.

Local Effect: The bill does not materially impact local government finances or operations.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Bill Summary: Each continuity of care plan at minimum must:

- if known by the child advocacy center and the former provider is employed by or contracted with the child advocacy center, provide written notification to the child and parent or guardian when there is a change in a provider of medical or mental health services that includes the name and contact information of the new and former provider to provide a means through which the child and parent or guardian can contact the new and former provider; and
- allow the former provider, in accordance with the provider's professional ethics and standards of care, to contact the child and parent or guardian to conduct a termination session and assist in the transfer of care (subject to the provision above).

By January 1 each year, beginning in 2027, GOCPP must publish on its website, for the immediately preceding year (1) a description of the standards for child advocacy centers established by the Maryland Statewide Organization for Child Advocacy Centers and information on compliance of each child advocacy center with the standards and (2) complaint information related to each child advocacy center, if applicable, and the resolution of any complaint received by GOCPP, unless such information is confidential or otherwise protected under federal law.

Current Law: GOCPP must establish and sustain child advocacy centers and ensure that every child in the State has access to a child advocacy center. In general, a child advocacy center provides services to children who have been abused.

The centers (1) may be based in private nonprofit organizations, local departments of social services, local law enforcement agencies, or a partnership among any of these entities; (2) must be developed and located to facilitate their use by alleged victims residing in the surrounding area; (3) must assist in the response to or investigation of allegations of sexual crimes against children and sexual abuse of minors; (4) may assist in the response to or investigation of allegations of child abuse and neglect and allegations of a crime of violence in the presence of a minor; (5) must provide a level of care that meets or exceeds the national accreditation standards for child advocacy centers; and (6) must be included in all joint investigation procedures, as specified.

GOCPP may contract with public or private nonprofit organizations to operate child advocacy centers. GOCPP must contract with a nonprofit organization that represents urban, rural, and suburban child advocacy centers in the State to establish a statewide organization. The purpose of the statewide organization is to provide training, technical assistance, data collection, and capacity building to meet local, State, and national requirements for child advocacy centers.

The Maryland Statewide Organization for Child Advocacy Centers must establish standards for child advocacy centers that meet national accreditation standards for child advocacy standards and must include:

- multidisciplinary teams that include representation from law enforcement, prosecutors, child protective services, the medical and mental health fields, and victim advocacy;
- cultural competency and diversity;
- forensic interviews that are neutral, fact-finding, and avoid duplicative interviewing;
- victim support and advocacy for children and caregivers, including appropriate counseling, legal, and medical services or referrals;
- medical evaluations;
- mental health services;
- a formal case review process;
- a case tracking, monitoring, and outcomes process;
- organizational capacity;
- creating a child-focused setting that is comfortable, safe, and private; and
- any additional necessary standards.

Money for child advocacy centers (1) must be distributed in accordance with a formula agreed on by the Maryland Statewide Organization for Child Advocacy Centers and GOCPP; (2) must be used to supplement, and not supplant, money that the program receives from other sources; and (3) may be used to assist centers in meeting the required standards.

State Expenditures: GOCPP advises that the number of complaints received from child advocacy centers under the bill each year cannot be reliably estimated at this time, and that additional staff is needed to collect complaints from child advocacy centers. However, according to information from the Department of Human Services, between 2019 and 2024, only two formal complaints were received by child advocacy centers. Even if the bill facilitates the additional reporting of complaints, the Department of Legislative Services (DLS) advises that the bill's requirements can likely be handled by GOCPP using existing staff resources. To the extent a more meaningful volume of complaints is consistently received, additional staff can be requested by GOCPP during the annual budget process. For context, costs associated with an additional administrator are approximately \$107,000 on an annual basis. This estimate assumes the Office of the Attorney General can likewise handle any additional complaints it receives from GOCPP using existing resources.

GOCPP provides grants to the Maryland Children’s Alliance (MCA) and 24 local child advocacy centers to ensure that every child in the State has access to a child advocacy center. GOCPP advises that the bill may require some child advocacy centers to hire additional staff; however, DLS notes that the bill’s requirements for child advocacy centers are procedural in nature and can likely be absorbed within existing budgeted resources.

Additional Comments: [MCA](#) is a nonprofit organization aimed to promote the well-being of children by supporting the development, growth, and continuation of children’s advocacy centers throughout the State.

Additional Information

Recent Prior Introductions: Similar legislation has not been introduced within the last three years.

Designated Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Governor’s Office of Crime Prevention and Policy; Maryland Department of Health; Department of Human Services; Department of Legislative Services

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