

BILL NO: Senate Bill 665
TITLE: Family Law - Custody Evaluator - Information to Parties
COMMITTEE: Judicial Proceedings
HEARING DATE: February 25, 2020
POSITION: **SUPPORT**

Senate Bill 665 would require a court, in any action in which child support, custody, or visitation is at issue to provide information to the parties regarding the role, availability, and cost of a custody evaluator. The Women's Law Center supports this bill as litigants need all pertinent information when pursuing their family cases, usually as self-represented litigants.

A custody evaluator is an individual appointed or approved by the court to perform a custody evaluation. On motion of a party or child's counsel, or on its own initiative, the court may order an assessment (including a custody evaluation) to aid the court in evaluating the health, safety, welfare, or best interests of a child in a contested custody or visitation case. Maryland Rule 9-205.3 establishes specified requirements for custody evaluators, including those related to education, licensing, and training. In some jurisdictions, custody evaluators are court employees and perform custody evaluations at no cost to the litigants. In other jurisdictions, the family support services coordinator maintains a list of qualified custody evaluators and the county administrative judge is required to develop and adopt maximum fee schedules for custody evaluations.

We are not sure that this is not happening in any jurisdictions, but certainly every litigant should know what expenses to expect in what can be a very expensive proposition. Perhaps it will lead to more settlement of cases prior to expenses being incurred.

Therefore, the Women's Law Center of Maryland, Inc. urges a favorable report on Senate Bill 665.

The Women's Law Center of Maryland is a private, non-profit, membership organization that serves as a leading voice for justice and fairness for women. It advocates for the rights of women through legal assistance to individuals and strategic initiatives to achieve systemic change. The Women's Law Center operates two hotlines, Protection Order Advocacy and Representation Projects in Baltimore City, Baltimore County and Carroll County and the Multi-Ethnic Domestic Violence Project.