



BILL NO: Senate Bill 355
TITLE: Family Law – Custody Evaluators – Qualifications and Training
COMMITTEE: Judicial Proceedings
HEARING DATE: January 26, 2021
POSITION: **SUPPORT**

The Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence (MNADV) is the state domestic violence coalition that brings together victim service providers, allied professionals, and concerned individuals for the common purpose of reducing intimate partner and family violence and its harmful effects on our citizens. **MNADV urges the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee to issue a favorable report on SB 355.**

Senate Bill 355 originates from the recommendations of the Workgroup to Study Child Custody Court Proceedings Involving Child Abuse or Domestic Violence Allegations, which was statutorily created in 2019. The Workgroup heard from numerous professional experts and met over an eighteen-month period to develop their recommendations. Custody evaluators conduct assessments to assist the court in evaluating the health, safety, welfare, or best interests of a child in a contested custody or visitation case. MNADV believes that custody evaluators, and all others involved in the custody determination process, should be fully trained on current science and research on topics related to adolescent development, Adverse Childhood Experiences, domestic abuse, child abuse, and other traumas.

MNADV fully supports the intent of this bill that would ensure that custody evaluators are fully informed on current best practices and research. Currently, qualifications for a person to be a custody evaluator are contained in Maryland Rule 9.205.3 CUSTODY AND VISITATION-RELATED ASSESSMENTS. The training needs and requirements for custody evaluators is always evolving as new research is developed. Codifying the specific training requirements in Maryland Code as opposed to defining the requirements in the Maryland Rules would require legislative action any time a change is needed.

For the above stated reasons, the **Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence urges a favorable report on SB 355.**