

**DATE:** March 22, 2021

**BILL NUMBER:** SB267

**COMMITTEE:** Judiciary

**BILL TITLE:** Family Law - Investigation of Suspected Child Abuse and Neglect - Preliminary Report to State's Attorney

**DHS POSITION:** Support

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Good afternoon Chairman Clippinger, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee.

I am Michelle L. Farr, Executive Director of the Social Services Administration, within the Maryland Department of Human Services. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of Senate Bill 267.

Current law requires the Local Departments of Social Services (LDSS) to report any preliminary findings of child abuse to the State's Attorney's Office within 10 days of opening a child abuse investigation. SB267 would remove this reporting requirement. The LDSS has made tremendous efforts to refine their practice model, in a way that serves the child and family holistically. This model includes a multidisciplinary team that includes the State's Attorney Office. As such, we believe this reporting requirement has become obsolete, in the light of the improved coordination between the LDSS, and the prosecutor's office within the Local Departments of Social Services and Child Advocacy Centers.

The Child Advocacy Center (CAC) model comprises a multidisciplinary team that includes law enforcement, legal services, child protective services, victim advocates, and medical and mental health services. Access to a comprehensive offering of services within one child-friendly facility is critical to the child's health and well-being. Without a multidisciplinary team to coordinate care for the child victim, the child may end up having to share very painful details about their abuse repeatedly to doctors, police officers, lawyers, therapists, investigators, judges, and others. The CAC model minimizes traumatization by having one streamlined intake process that is followed up with wrap-around services.

With this practice model, the Office of the State's Attorney is involved in a child abuse investigation at the outset of the case. There is no need to issue a separate report of preliminary findings, because the LDSS and law enforcement conduct a joint investigation in many situations and share the information with the prosecutor at the conclusion of the investigation. This reporting requirement does not serve any meaningful purpose, does not complement practice, and creates an unnecessary procedural step for the LDSS staff.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of SB267. We appreciate your support as we continue to improve the delivery of our services, and streamline our processes. I ask the committee to give SB 267 a favorable report.

