

Good morning Chairman and distinguished committee members,

I am Anne Hoyer. I have worked in the Maryland Secretary of State's Office for almost eight years. My primary role was developing and heading up the Safe at Home Program which provides a lifesaving tool for victims of violence. A large percentage of those individuals found themselves in family custody court, for obvious reasons. Prior to my position with the State, I worked with multiple organizations and experts who work in the child abuse and domestic violence arena. Since 2005, I have been engaged in conversation with protective parents (both men and women) who were and are desperately seeking protection and justice through our court system. Many of these cases have a commonality in that system errors and beliefs have left them in the same situation if not worse.

In 2018, I was honored to be appointed to a legislated workgroup. HB561 is a product from that Workgroup. This group was charged with seeking out common sense solutions to address the challenges family courts are faced with when overseeing custody cases where allegations of abuse or domestic violence is alleged. As anyone can imagine, these cases are far from easy and very complex. One of the recommendations was to provide lifesaving training/awareness to judges presiding over these very difficult cases. This will give them the necessary tools to assist them in making life altering decisions for children and families. As well as alleviating some anxiety and apprehension typically associated with judges participating in family court matters. It may also protect them from a life of PTSD in the event of a "decision gone badly." The judges are not experts in this field. That being said, they need to be aware of the current scientific based tools that are available to them. These training subject matters can be the difference between a life of abuse or in some cases death.

*Resolution 72 (US House of Representatives passed in 2018) recommending all states put child safety as the number one priority in custody and parenting decisions.

I want to thank you for allowing me to speak today and I urge a favorable vote on HB561.

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