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Appropriations Committee

Vice Chair
Health and Social Services
Subcommittee



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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

House Judiciary Committee

Thursday, March 4, 2022

**HB 1248:Child Abuse and Neglect—Investigations- Timelines
FWA**

Dear Chair Clippinger and Vice Chair Chang:

HB 1248 addresses a longstanding and well documented problem with the Department of Human Services (DHS) Local Departments of Social Services (LDSS) child abuse reporting.

The Joint Audit and Evaluation Committee received repeated audit findings between 2017 and 2021 which compelled the need for this legislation. The timeline of reports includes:

In the November 20, 2017 *Child Protective Services Social Services Administration (SSA) Report*, JAEC was informed that:

- SSA did not monitor the timeliness of child abuse and neglect investigations conducted by the LDSS. In addition, reviews and investigations of allegations were not always performed timely. (page 23)
- Specific to assessments of substance-exposed newborns, SSA did not monitor the timeliness of completed assessments by the LDSS. In addition the assessments were not always completed within the required time frames. (page 25)
- The report also noted that SSA lacked adequate controls to ensure the LDSS were immediately notified of children born to individuals who had previously had their parental rights terminated for abuse or neglect.
- The findings noted that SSA did not ensure that the local departments complete an assessment of these high risk families and offer services when appropriate. (page 26)

In the June 7 2019 Local Departments of Social Services OIG Audit Findings DHS- report:

- Numerous LDSS deficiencies related to critical Social Services Administration policies, including child and adult protective services, and the out-of-home placement program. (page 11)

In the June 3, 2021 Child Protective Services SSA Report:

- SSA's monitoring process was not effective for both ensuring timeliness of child abuse and neglect investigations and for the required assessments of substance-exposed newborns conducted by the LDSS. (page 18).
- It also noted SSA lacked adequate controls to ensure the LDSS were immediately notified of children born to individuals who previously had their parental rights terminated for abuse or neglect. (page 20).

HB 1248 will:

- Require the Local Department of Social Services (LDSS) who fails to conduct an investigation of child abuse or which fails to complete a report in the assigned timeline to:
 1. Report the delay and the reason to the supervisor;
 2. Maintain a record of the delay and the reason for the delay in the child's case file;
 3. Require a LDSS supervisor who receives the report to review and sign the report;
 4. Report to the General Assembly on or before each December 1 on the progress of the LDSS in the state in complying with the time frames and reporting requirements.

Amendment

Please note that there is an amendment which would sunset the reporting requirements to the General Assembly in 5 years.

Our state's most vulnerable children merit our attention, oversight and Protection.

I urge a favorable report on HB 1248.