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THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
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**Support SB 820:
Child Abuse and Neglect - Investigations - Timeliness**

Background:

- The Maryland Department of Human Services (DHS) along with the Local Departments of Social Service (LDSS) have had documented issues regarding the timeliness of child abuse and neglect investigation reporting.
- The LDSS or local law enforcement must attempt to see the child and decide on the safety of the child within 24 hours after receiving a report of suspected physical or sexual abuse, and within five days after receiving a report of suspected child neglect or mental injury.
- To the extent possible, a child abuse or neglect investigation must be completed within 10 days after receiving the initial notice of suspected abuse or neglect.
- An investigation that is not completed within 30 days must be completed within no more than 60 days of the initial receipt of the first notice of suspected abuse or neglect.

The Issue:

- The Joint Audit and Evaluation Committee (JAEC) has received repeated audit findings over the last five years which has compelled the need for legislation to better understand the issues regarding the timeliness of investigative reporting.
- In the June 2019 report, JAEC found that there were numerous LDSS deficiencies related to critical social service administration policies, including child and adult protective services.
- In the [June 2021 report](#), JAEC found that the SSA monitoring processes were not effective for both ensuring the timeliness of child abuse and neglect investigations and for required assessments.

What SB 820 Does As Amended:

- SB 820 enhances the ability of local departments to investigate abuse and neglect reports within statutory time frames while also providing the General Assembly and Governor insights to guide future legislation to support DHS.

- SB 820 authorizes licensed professional counselors to conduct these abuse and neglect assessments to assist local departments of social services.
- SB 820 will require the LDSS that fails to conduct a child abuse or neglect investigation or complete a certain report within the specific statutory time frames to report the delay and the reason for the delay to the supervisor within the local department.
- SB 820 will require that on or before December 1, 2022, and each subsequent December 1st, the Department shall report to the Maryland General Assembly on the progress of the local department in complying with the time frames for conducting investigations and completing reports of child abuse and neglect.
- SB 820 requires that DHS analyze the state of workload within the Department's child welfare systems to highlight recommendations to mitigate understaffing and be presented to the Budget and Tax and Appropriations Committees.
- SB 820 will sunset in five years after sufficient insights have been gathered to propose policy solutions to issues facing the Department.

What SB 820 Accomplishes:

- SB 820 will highlight areas of need within DHS and the LDSS that can be addressed in future legislation and used as leverage for additional funding, resources, and policy solutions.
- SB 820 will ensure that supervisors within LDSS will be made aware of and have greater insight into investigations that fail to meet statutory deadlines.
- SB 820 will make certain that investigations that are not completed in due time will be escalated to supervisors who can intervene much earlier in the process as they are able.