



February 17, 2022

House Bill 561

**Child Custody – Cases Involving Child Abuse or Domestic Violence – Training for Judges
Judiciary Committee**

Position: SUPPORT

The Maryland Association of Resources for Families and Youth (MARFY) is an association of private child caring organizations providing foster care, group homes, and other services through more than 200 programs across Maryland. The members of MARFY represent providers who serve Maryland's most vulnerable children who are in out of home placements due to abuse, neglect or severe mental health, and medical needs. We operate group homes, treatment foster care programs and independent living programs, primarily serving the foster care population as well as a juvenile services population.

On behalf of the provider community in Maryland, we would like to thank you for your attention to the critical issue facing children and families in Maryland today; and we fully support the efforts brought forward in House Bill 561.

Without proper protections in place, children are subject to ongoing trauma because of continued exposure to abusive parents and parent victims of domestic violence continue to face risks of further abuse. This bill requires the Judiciary, in consultation with domestic violence and child abuse organizations, to develop a training program for judges presiding over child custody cases involving child abuse or domestic violence. Among other provisions, the bill also (1) establishes minimum training requirements for judges presiding over child custody cases involving child abuse or domestic violence and (2) requires the Maryland Judiciary to report the name of a judge who does not comply with the training requirements to the Commission on Judicial Disabilities.

Considering the lifelong impacts child abuse and neglect have on both individual victims and society at large, there is a clear interest in properly addressing child abuse and domestic violence in custody decisions. It is also appropriate, however, to acknowledge the tremendous responsibility bestowed on judges who preside over these cases and not to minimize the difficulty of their role.

We once again thank the General Assembly for recognizing the importance of protecting victims of domestic violence and child abuse by passing significant legislation aimed at increasing access to legal protections and remedies as well as ensuring the proper reporting of and response to suspected child abuse. It is for these aforementioned reasons, that we politely ask for a FAVORABLE report on House Bill 561. Thank you.

For more information call or email:

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