



January 31, 2023

The Honorable Ben Barnes  
Chair, House Appropriations Committee  
Room 121  
House Office Building  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

**HB 186 – Victim Services Programs Supplementing Federal Funding and Support (Victim Services Stabilization Act)**

**POSITION: Favorable**

Dear Chairman Barnes:

On behalf of the Maryland Children's Alliance (MCA), thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of HB 186. MCA is a private nonprofit organization that functions as a State Chapter within the National Children's Alliance that serves as a convener of the 24 children's advocacy centers (CACs) across Maryland. We truly appreciate your leadership to ensure that there are sufficient resources available for child victims of abuse, assault, trafficking and sextortion. HB 186 offers much needed financial stability to CACs and other organizations that serve victims of crime by requiring the Governor to supplement funding provided by the federal Victim of Crimes Act (VOCA). We especially appreciate being included in the bill to provide recommendations on the allocation of funding to the Governor's Office of Crime Prevention, Youth and Victim Services.

CACs are child-focused facilities that help abused children heal by coordinating the investigation and treatment of child abuse through the multi-disciplinary team response. CACs also provide children and families with advocacy and case coordination to help prevent a child victim from falling through the cracks of an overworked system, and to get the help they need to heal once the investigation has concluded.

The multi-disciplinary teams in CACs are made up of forensic interviewers, family advocates, medical providers, law enforcement, child protective services, trauma therapists, and prosecutors. The multi-disciplinary approach focuses the investigation so that a child victim does not have to retell the worst experience of their lives over and over. The CAC multi-disciplinary team works collaboratively to provide the best outcomes for children and communities. Every jurisdiction in the state of Maryland now has the ability to respond to allegations of child maltreatment in a way which best supports healing for children who are survivors of abuse.

When police or child protective services believe a child is being abused, the child is brought by a caregiver or other “safe” adult to the CAC: a safe, child-focused environment. At the CAC, the child tells their story to a uniquely-trained forensic interviewer who provides a trauma-informed, non-leading, but fact-finding interview. Then, based on the interview, the team makes decisions together about how to help the child. This team response is the backbone of the CAC.

In 2021, Maryland’s 24 CACs served 5,474 children. During January - June 2022, Maryland CACs provided services to more than 3,100 children, indicating an increase in the need for services. Staffing shortages, inflation, and rising demand for services are creating increasing challenges for our CACs. By passing HB 186, we have an opportunity to stabilize the availability of VOCA funding for MCA and Maryland’s 24 child advocacy centers. This will help increase successful prosecution of perpetrators, streamline coordination of inter-agency services, and minimize trauma through therapeutic interventions.

Thank you again for your continued support of MCA and Maryland’s CACs, and for the opportunity to provide testimony on this vitally important issue. For these reasons, MCA requests a favorable report on HB 186 for the Child Advocacy Center Services grant to support the important work being done for Maryland’s child victims of abuse.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Wendy Myers', written in a cursive style.

Wendy Myers, Executive Director

Maryland Children’s Alliance