



TO: The Honorable Ben Barnes, Chair
Members, House Appropriations Committee

FROM: Pamela Metz Kasemeyer
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DATE: January 31, 2023

RE: **SUPPORT** – House Bill 186 – *Victim Services Programs – Supplementing Federal Funding and Support (Victim Services Stabilization Act)*

The Maryland Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics (MDAAP) is a statewide association representing more than 1,100 pediatricians and allied pediatric and adolescent healthcare practitioners in the State and is a strong and established advocate promoting the health and safety of all the children we serve. On behalf of MDAAP, we submit this letter of **support** for House Bill 186.

The *Victims of Crimes Act (VOCA)* provides funding to states to support victim service programs. VOCA funds in Maryland are managed through the Governor's Office of Crime Prevention, Youth, and Victim Services (GOCPYV), which uses VOCA funds to award grants to victim service organizations throughout the state. VOCA grants provide coverage for essential services, such as forensic interviews and medical evaluations, family advocacy, and mental health treatment, which are critical in meeting the needs of maltreated children and their families.

House Bill 186 would stabilize funding for victim service programs by using state funds to supplement fluctuations in federal VOCA funding. VOCA funding has fluctuated dramatically from year to year despite the fact that the number of Maryland children with suspected maltreatment, and therefore the need for services, has remained consistently high. Lack of consistent funding makes it difficult, if not impossible, to sustain victim services for maltreated children. Failure to provide these needed services increases the likelihood of revictimization and ongoing physical and mental health needs. Passage of House Bill 186 will prevent the fluctuation in funding for victim services, thereby enabling the State to consistently provide services to children who have been victimized. A favorable report is requested.