



March 7, 2023

The Honorable William C Smith Jr., Chair; and
Members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
2 East, Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: SB 503 – Opposition

Dear Chairman Smith and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of National Children's Alliance, our 939 member Children's Advocacy Centers across the US, and the more than 380,000 victims of child abuse and child sex trafficking we serve each year, we write to urge your opposition to SB 503. We believe that all interested parties have the best interests of children at heart. Though well intentioned, we find the proposed legislation to be ill-conceived at best, unnecessary at least, and counter-productive at worst. National Children's Alliance values its partnership with members of the American Psychological Association and its respective state chapters. However, for a variety of reasons, we must actively oppose SB 503, and we ask you to do the same.

National Children's Alliance (NCA) is the nationally recognized and federally supported accrediting body for Children's Advocacy Centers (CACs). Maryland law requires that CACs be developed and located throughout the state to ensure that every child has access to the best-known services and practices in response to allegations of sexual crimes against children. The statute further requires that these centers meet or exceed NCA's strict standards for national accreditation. These standards represent the work of more than 130 child abuse intervention professionals, including members of the American Psychological Association working from the latest data, evidence, and research. About every five years, these standards are revised and updated to reflect the latest evidence and practice. Newly revised standards took effect January 1, 2023.

Continuity of care is of course an ongoing priority for all CACs. For this reason, NCA Standards for Accreditation require that therapists be licensed or working under the supervision of someone who is licensed while seeking licensure themselves. The effect of this requirement is to ensure that therapists are duty bound by American Psychological Association and National Association of Social Workers Codes of Ethics, and/or any similar rules adopted by a state. As such, all therapists have an ethical duty to appropriately transition those they can no longer serve for whatever

reason. Again, we assume that this legislation is well intentioned, but the actual effect would be to confuse ownership of responsibility and could be used to deflect blame for dereliction of duty. It is an unfortunate reality that things like this will happen, but when they do there are proper procedures already in place. In this instance, the correct course of action would be to file a complaint with the Maryland Board of Examiners of Psychologists for review.

We would be remiss if we failed to point out that in the specific incident which appears to have inspired this legislation, the CAC followed the exact procedures that this legislation attempts to codify. In this case it was deemed appropriate and acceptable. However, that might not always be the case and could in fact often be terribly inappropriate. In most instances therapists are not employed by CACs, but rather have linkage agreements through which they provide their services. There are certainly instances where it would be wildly inappropriate for a staff member of a CAC who is involved in the investigation of a case to then become directly involved in the provision of health services, mental or medical.

With respect to the whistleblower protections curiously inserted into this bill, we firmly believe this language to be unnecessarily redundant as adequate protections already exist in numerous other statutes and rules, both state and federal as well as in various municipal and county codes.

Because CACs have been on the front lines in intervening and preventing child abuse and child exploitation for over 30 years, we know well what works. Last year alone our member centers provided services to 386,191 children and provided child abuse prevention training to over 2.8 million individuals. The provisions contained in SB 503 would confuse professional service providers and could be truly harmful to the CAC model and to the children and families we serve. We know of no similar legislation in any state across the country. Therefore, we oppose SB 503 and request your unfavorable consideration of this measure as well.

Child abuse is a far too common experience for America's children. And, while sadly we may never be able to prevent all instances of abuse, we do know that with the appropriate response we can limit additional trauma and improve outcomes by providing justice and walking children and families down a path towards healing. We are always ready and willing to work with you and other partner organizations to improve outcomes for children, but this particular piece of legislation may do more harm than good.

Thank you again for your consideration of this matter.

Sincerely,



Teresa Huizar
Executive Director
National Children's Alliance