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POSITION ON PROPOSED LEGISLATION

BILL: HB 324: Child Abuse and Neglect- Definition of Neglect

FROM: Maryland Office of the Public Defender

POSITION: Favorable

DATE: 02/06/2023

The Maryland Office of the Public Defender respectfully requests that the Committee issue a favorable report on House Bill 324.

I am Zina Charles, a licensed social worker with the Maryland Office of the Public Defender Parental Defensive Team. I am writing this letter in support of House Bill 324: Child Abuse and Neglect-Definition of Neglect.

Domestic violence is the pattern of coercive, controlling behaviors used by a person to gain or maintain power and domination over their intimate partner. These behaviors may include physical, sexual, emotional financial, verbal, and/or spiritual abuse¹.

Only 52% of victims of domestic violence report incidents to authorities in the United States². The State of Maryland has granted 4,113 temporary protection orders and 1,859 final protective orders granted for domestic violence³.

The effects of domestic violence can cause victims to believe the abuse is their fault, that the abuser loves them, the abuser is not always violent. Victims of domestic violence are often isolated, and economically dependent on the abuser. Reporting domestic violence can cause further abuse and loss of custody of one's children⁴.

In my position, I have seen my clients who are victims of violence blamed for their abuse and have their children removed from their care due to being charged with neglect. Passing this bill will help to protect victims of domestic violence from facing legal consequences of neglect for facing domestic violence.

For these reasons, the Maryland Office of the Public Defender urges this Committee to issue a favorable report on House Bill 324.

Submitted by: Maryland Office of the Public Defender, Government Relations Division.

Authored by: Zina Charles, LGSW, LMSW, Social Worker

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1. Child Welfare Information Gateway, Definitions of Domestic Violence (2021). <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/defdomvio.pdf>
2. United States Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics, Criminal Victimization (2019).
3. Maryland Judiciary Court Operations Department . Maryland Judiciary Statistical Abstract (2018).
4. Los Angeles Police Department. Domestic Violence Reasons Why Battered Victims Stay with the Batterers

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