



**January 25, 2024**

**The Honorable Luke Clippinger, Chair  
Maryland House Judiciary Committee  
Lowe House Office Building Room 121  
6 Bladen Street  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401**

**HB141 – Criminal Procedure – Child Abuse Victim – Testimony Taken Outside the Courtroom**

**POSITION: Support**

Dear Chairman Clippinger:

On behalf of the Maryland Children's Alliance (MCA), thank you for the opportunity to support legislation which will better support the health of child victims of abuse. MCA is a private nonprofit organization that functions as a State Chapter within the National Children's Alliance and serves as a convener of the 24 children's advocacy centers (CACs) across Maryland. We are in support of HB141 which establishes a presumed standard of practice for court testimony for child victims under the age of 13 in Maryland.

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. 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. 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.

CACs enable victims to share their trauma to trained professionals who are part of a multidisciplinary team which works collaboratively to provide the best outcomes for children and communities. 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 participates in an interview with 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 2022, Maryland's 24 CACs served 5,565 children. During the first 6 months of 2023, Maryland CACs provided services to more than 2,800 children. The mission of our CACs is to reduce the trauma of abuse

for this vulnerable population. HB141 will provide an opportunity to reduce the trauma associated with providing testimony in the presence of the alleged maltreater. Child victims will still be required to provide information related to their abuse, but in a way which assists in reducing the long-term impact of the requirement thereby providing a trauma-informed response to child victimization.

Thank you again for your support of MCA and Maryland's CACs, and for the opportunity to provide testimony on this vitally important issue. Maryland Children's Alliance requests a favorable report on HB141 to support Maryland's child victims of abuse, assault, neglect, exploitation and trafficking.

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