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THE SENATE OF MARYLAND  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

**Testimony in Support of SB0770 - Applicants for Positions Involving Direct Contact With Minors - Required Information, Review Process, and Reporting - Alterations**

Mr. Chair, Madame Vice Chair, and members of the Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee:

Protecting the most vulnerable members of our communities—especially our children—remains one of my highest priorities as a Maryland state senator. That’s why I am introducing SB0700, a bill designed to strengthen child sexual abuse prevention by enhancing oversight, improving background checks, and expanding safeguards across all child-serving organizations. This legislation builds on previous efforts, closing existing gaps to ensure we are doing everything possible to keep children safe.

The need for this bill became clear after concerns from parents and community members about how schools handle allegations of child sexual abuse. Although legal proceedings in a recent case are still ongoing, it underscored the urgent need for stronger policies that prioritize student safety. I know that the parents of victims in this case would want nothing more than to be here to share their stories and advocate for change. However, out of respect for the ongoing criminal investigation and to avoid jeopardizing the case, they are unable to provide public testimony at this time. Their voices, though absent today, have been a driving force behind this legislation.

Schools and other child-serving organizations must have clear, effective safeguards to minimize risks and ensure that every employee meets the highest standards of trust and integrity. Every child deserves a safe and nurturing environment where their well-being is paramount.

In 2018 and 2019, Maryland made important strides in preventing child sexual abuse with the passage of House Bill 1072 and House Bill 486, which introduced mandatory training, codes of conduct, and employee screening in schools. However, without robust oversight and enforcement, even the strongest policies can fall short.

SB0700 addresses this gap by amending these earlier laws to require the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) to actively oversee their implementation. Each jurisdiction will now be required to submit its training programs, codes of conduct, and staff screening policies to MSDE annually. In turn, MSDE will compile this information and provide regular reports to the Maryland General Assembly on the progress and compliance of these programs.

This added layer of accountability ensures that safety policies are not just written but enforced and continuously improved.

While current law requires criminal background checks for employees in Maryland's schools and child-serving institutions, this step alone isn't enough. Criminal checks often fail to identify individuals who have been found responsible for child maltreatment but haven't been criminally convicted. To close this gap, SB0700 will mandate Child Protective Services (CPS) background checks before hiring new employees. CPS checks are crucial in identifying individuals who pose a risk to children, even if they have no criminal record, providing a stronger safety net for our kids.

But the responsibility to protect children shouldn't stop at the school gates. Child predators often seek employment in other child-serving environments like day care centers, after-school programs, and youth sports leagues. This bill expands the requirements established by HB1072 and HB486 to all child-serving organizations, ensuring consistent safeguards wherever children are present. By standardizing these protections, we prevent individuals who pose a risk from simply moving between organizations undetected.

Every child deserves a safe space to learn, play, and grow. SB0700 represents a vital step forward in safeguarding our children by giving schools and child-serving organizations the tools, oversight, and accountability they need to prevent abuse.

My heart breaks for every child who has endured the trauma of sexual abuse. No child should ever face that pain, and it is our moral obligation to do everything in our power to protect them. We cannot wait—we must act now to strengthen our safeguards and ensure that child predators never gain access to the most vulnerable among us.