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**LETTER OF INFORMATION
HOUSE BILL 1480**

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Governor's Office of Crime Prevention and Policy (GOCPP)

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The Governor's Office of Crime Prevention and Policy (GOCPP) advises the Governor on criminal justice strategies, coordinates across public safety agencies, and allocates resources statewide to support public safety.

[Section 11-928 of the Criminal Procedure Article](#) requires GOCPP to establish and sustain Child Advocacy Centers (CACs) in the State. The law requires GOCPP to delegate oversight of CACs to the Maryland Statewide Organization for Child Advocacy Centers. The Maryland Children's Alliance (MCA) is that organization and has served as the link between the State and the 24 local CACs. GOCPP also provides grant funding to MCA and the local CACs throughout the State.

The primary purpose of this program is to coordinate the investigation of child abuse and neglect and to provide services to children and their non-offending family members without causing further trauma. Funds assist subrecipients in providing victim assistance, advocacy, support, and other coordinated justice system responses. Funds also assist CACs in becoming accredited by the National Children's Alliance (NCA).

Maryland currently has 24 CACs operating in all 24 jurisdictions. The management structures of the CACs differ by jurisdiction, as the General Assembly authorized GOCPP to "contract with public or private nonprofit organizations" to run county-level CACs and allow CACs to be "based in private nonprofit organizations, local departments of social services, local law enforcement agencies, or a partnership any of these entities." In Maryland, government entities (i.e., local social services agencies, state's attorneys' offices, and law enforcement agencies) operate 17 CACs. The remaining seven are nonprofit agencies. The CACs operated by local governments are subject to their local government's oversight. Any CAC employee or contractor providing mental or medical healthcare is subject to professional licensing requirements and standards.

HB1480 proposes additional requirements for CACs and their contractors, the Office of the Attorney General (OAG), and GOCPP. The bill requires CACs to establish continuity of care plans that include written notification to the child and their parent or guardian when there's a change in the medical or mental health service provider, detailing the contact information of both

the new and former providers *and* allow the former provider to conduct a termination session and assist in the transfer of care. It creates a new complaint review process that sends complaints about CACs through CACs, to GOCPP, and finally to the OAG. HB1480 also [restates requirements currently outlined in Maryland law](#) requiring the licensure of individuals providing medical or mental health services.

These requirements are concerning for several reasons. First, requiring a CAC to facilitate communication between a former provider, a client, and their parent or guardian without any limitations based on the reason for the provider's termination or the parent's role in the alleged abuse is dangerous to children. The bill includes no guardrails to protect children from potentially harmful communication. [Many children \(1,715 out of 5,387\) who receive services through Maryland CACs have been abused by a parent](#). Including a parent or guardian in notifications about care related to familial abuse could place children at risk of further harm. Current law contemplates this risk and protects the right of certain children under certain circumstances to make decisions about their own medical and mental healthcare without consultation with a parent or guardian.^{1,2,3} One of the circumstances is that [“notice to the parent or guardian may lead to physical or emotional abuse of the minor.”](#) Further, if a provider was terminated for cause, it could be harmful to allow them to contact a child.

Second, the changes will be challenging to implement. HB1480 requires GOCPP to receive and forward complaints against CACs to the OAG “if necessary.” GOCPP does not currently have the expertise or capacity to receive and screen complaints. Knowing of only two complaints in recent history, it's difficult to project the range of issues the agency would have to address. GOCPP could not fulfill this responsibility without additional resources.

Please contact me at bethany.young@maryland.gov if you have questions about my testimony or GOCPP's role in Maryland CACs.