



Working to end sexual violence in Maryland

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Testimony Supporting Senate Bill 333
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The Maryland Coalition Against Sexual Assault (MCASA) is a non-profit membership organization that includes the State's seventeen rape crisis centers, law enforcement, mental health and health care providers, attorneys, educators, survivors of sexual violence and other concerned individuals. MCASA includes the Sexual Assault Legal Institute (SALI), a statewide legal services provider for survivors of sexual assault. MCASA represents the unified voice and combined energy of all of its members working to eliminate sexual violence. We urge the Judicial Proceedings Committee to report favorably on Senate Bill 333.

Senate Bill 333 – Statements by Children to Forensic Interviewers

Since 1988, Maryland has recognized that cases involving abuse of vulnerable young children require different responses than cases involving older victims. Current law permits juries and judges to hear “tender years” testimony about statements a young child has made regarding child sexual abuse, child abuse (or child neglect in juvenile court). Crim. Pro. Art. § 11-304. The law limits this exception to statements made to certain professionals. SB333 expands this list of professionals to include forensic interviewers working at child advocacy centers.

Child Advocacy Centers (CACs) are child friendly facilities where child victims of maltreatment may be interviewed, undergo medical examinations, and receive therapy at the same time that their cases are investigated for possible prosecution or Department of Social Services intervention. These agencies work to create a child-focused system that protects children, collects reliable and admissible evidence, and prevents offenders from abusing again. Forensic interviewers at CACs are expert at eliciting truthful statements from children and avoiding leading children or encouraging one statement over another. These skilled professionals are at the heart of Maryland's trauma informed response to children who have been or may have been sexual abused. Adding them to the current list of professionals who can testify about what they have heard is an appropriate and needed improvement to current law.

**The Maryland Coalition Against Sexual Assault urges the
Judicial Proceedings Committee to report favorably on Senate Bill 333**