



11724 Ocean Gateway, Suite 3
Ocean City, MD 21842
410-213-1147 Fax 410-213-1128
www.donahuelawgroup.net

Sharon M. Donahue
Admitted in Maryland & The District of Columbia

January 17, 2025

**To the members of the House Judiciary and Senate Judicial Proceedings
Committees:**

Sharon M. Donahue, Esq. of The Law Firm of Sharon M. Donahue, P.A. strongly supports HB 152/SB 25 – Family Law – Child Custody Evaluators – Qualifications. As an attorney for Children In Need of Assistance throughout the Eastern Shore of Maryland and a long time domestic law practitioner focusing on child custody matters, I ask for a swift and favorable report on this important child protection legislation.

HB 152/SB 25 would help ensure the safety and well-being of children involved in child custody court proceedings involving child abuse or domestic violence. This priority child safety legislation would require that child custody evaluators have basic qualifications and receive basic training before being appointed or approved by a court to perform a custody evaluation in those child custody cases involving domestic violence or child abuse.

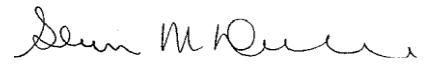
Having practiced family law with a strong focus on child custody cases over the past twenty years, far too often custody evaluations are assigned to Licensed Clinical Social Workers that lack specific clinical training in child abuse, particularly in circumstances where the children are products of generational trauma, violence and drug abuse in the home. Oftentimes, the court relies solely on the recommendation of the Custody Evaluator to the exclusion of other voices in the courtroom (including child counsel). As a result, the decisions made may not be in the best interests of the children being evaluated. Although custody evaluators are well-meaning, there needs to be a benchmark of training for the evaluators as well as having more experienced evaluators mentor the less experienced evaluators to make sure Maryland's children are treated fairly and their best interests and safety are protected. Thus, we need to ensure the selection of qualified and trained child custody evaluators in child custody cases involving domestic violence and child abuse.

This legislation is all about putting the child first, and passage of SB 25 and HB 152 is long overdue. For the past five years, legislation has been introduced to require qualified and trained child custody evaluators be appointed in these most sensitive child custody cases involving domestic violence and child abuse. This legislation mirrors the Judiciary's updated Rule 9-205.3, and it is imperative that these vital child protections are passed into law without further delay.

Putting in statute that Maryland's child custody evaluators shall be qualified and specifically trained will help protect children in these most sensitive and potentially dangerous child custody cases involving allegations of child abuse and domestic violence.

I urge you to support HB 152/SB 25. Thank you for your kind attention and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Sharon M. Donahue".

Sharon M. Donahue