

THE COALITION TO PROTECT MARYLAND'S CHILDREN

Our Mission: To combine and amplify the power of organizations and citizens working together to keep children safe from abuse and neglect.

We strive to secure budgetary and public policy resources to make meaningful and measurable improvements in safety, permanence, and wellbeing.



**HB0152 - Family Law – Child Custody Evaluators –
Qualifications
House Judiciary Committee
January 23, 2025 at 11:00 a.m.**

Position: SUPPORT

The Coalition to Protect Maryland's Children is a consortium of organizations and individuals formed in 1996 who are concerned about the care of Maryland's most vulnerable children and work together to promote meaningful child welfare reform. CPMC urges a favorable report on HB0152 - Family Law – Child Custody Evaluators – Qualifications.¹

HB0152 seeks to establish qualifications and trainings for professionals appointed or approved as child custody evaluators by the court as well as eligibility to provide expert evidence in custody or visitation proceedings that include allegations of child maltreatment. Judges often rely on the assessments made by child custody evaluators in court proceedings. Ensuring proper qualifications, experience and training of custody evaluators – on childhood development, trauma, various types of child abuse and neglect and investigations, as well as the dynamics of domestic violence – is central to the very standard judges use to decide custody, i.e., “the best interest of the child”. The proposed training includes critical science about early childhood brain development, how traumatic events impacts this development, state-investigatory processes and their limits, interpersonal dynamics that contribute to abusive behavior, the validity of and need for risk assessments, and preventive measures to mitigate abuse.

The bill stems from the recommendations of the Workgroup to Study Child Custody Court Proceedings Involving Child Abuse or Domestic Violence Allegations, which was established by SB 567 in the 2019 session. The Workgroup issued its 140-page report in September 2020 adopting over 20 recommendations.²

CPMC supports measures designed to improve the legal system's ability to appropriately and effectively intervene and prevent child abuse and neglect. It is for this reason that the Coalition to Protect Maryland's Children **urges a favorable report** on HB0152 - Family Law – Child Custody Evaluators – Qualifications.

¹ Members of CPMC represented by this written testimony include Center for Hope, Child Justice, Court Appointed Special Advocates (MD CASA), Court Appointed Special Advocates (Baltimore County), The Family Tree, MD Chapter - American Academy of Pediatrics, Maryland Association of Resources for Families and Youth (MARFY), National Association of Social Workers - MD, and State Council on Child Abuse and Neglect.

²https://dls.maryland.gov/pubs/prod/NoPblTabMtg/CmsnChdAbuseDomViol/FinalReport_Workgroup_to_Study_Child_Custody_Court_Proceedings_Involving_Child_Abuse_or_Domestic_Violence.pdf