

HB 152 (Delegate Kaufman)
Position: Support (FAV)
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My name is Tina Swithin, and for the past 13 years, I have been advocating for family court reform across the country. My organization, One Mom's Battle, has a chapter in Maryland which I oversee and manage.

It is highly alarming that I could take any family court cases in the state of Maryland and put it in front of five different evaluators – I guarantee we would have five wildly different outcomes based on the evaluator's licensing, training, expertise, experience and biases. This coupled with the fact that family court has no checks and balances, no regulation and no oversight -- it is terrifying. Even more so given that we are discussing the most vulnerable members of our society, our children. Our children deserve evaluators who are trained to make recommendations that are truly in their best interest.

Family court system is arguably one of the most important branches of our judicial system; it is cradling children's lives in its hands. Every week, I hear stories of horrific abuse and of children being murdered. The only thing worse than hearing these stories is knowing that in most of these cases, the tragic outcomes were preventable.

It seems fundamental that any evaluator responsible for decisions impacting a child's life should have training in domestic violence, child neglect, child abuse and trauma—that should be a basic and essential requirement for ***all*** professionals working in the family court system.

Maryland has an opportunity to lead the nation in passing legislation that prioritizes child safety above all else. There is still a tremendous amount of work to do but this is a huge step in the right direction.

HB 152 is common sense – protecting children is common sense and it is time that we infuse common sense into family court proceedings.

