



# FREDERICK COUNTY GOVERNMENT

**DIVISION OF FAMILY SERVICES**  
Child Advocacy Center

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County Executive

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## **HB 442 – Criminal Procedure – Victims and Witnesses – Out of Court Statement of Child to Forensic Interviewer**

**DATE:** February 4, 2025  
**COMMITTEE:** Judiciary Committee  
**POSITION:** Favorable  
**FROM:** Director of the Child Advocacy Center (CAC) of Frederick County

As the Director of the Child Advocacy Center of Frederick County, I urge the committee to give **HB 442 – Criminal Procedure – Victims and Witnesses – Out of Court Statement of Child to Forensic Interviewer** a favorable report.

This crucial legislation seeks to expand the tender years hearsay exception to include statements made by children to trained forensic interviewers, thereby enhancing the justice system's ability to protect vulnerable children while reducing the trauma associated with repeat questioning.

The National Children's Alliance (NCA) serves as the accrediting body for Child Advocacy Centers (CACs). In Maryland, there are 24 CACs, 17 accredited members and 7 working toward accreditation. To achieve and maintain accreditation, a CAC must meet or exceed 10 Standards of Accreditation. One of these, Standard 03- Forensic Interview, includes 8 Essential Components, 3 of which focus specifically on a forensic interviewer's initial and ongoing training, ongoing education, and professional development.

### **Essential Component A**

Forensic interviews are provided by MDT/CAC staff with specialized training in conducting forensic interviews.

The CAC must demonstrate that all forensic interviewer(s) have successfully completed training that includes the following elements:

1. Minimum of 32 hours of instruction and practice
2. Evidence-supported interview protocol
3. Pre- and post-testing that reflects understanding of the principles of legally sound interviewing
4. Child development; question design; implementation of protocol; dynamics of abuse; disclosure process; diversity, equity, and inclusion; and suggestibility
5. Practice opportunities with a standardized evaluation process
6. Required reading of current articles specific to the practice of forensic interviewing

Curriculum must be included on NCA's approved list of nationally or state-recognized forensic interview trainings or submitted with the accreditation application for review and approval.

### **Essential Component B**

Individuals who conduct forensic interviews must demonstrate participation in ongoing education in the field of child maltreatment and/or forensic interviewing for a minimum of eight contact hours every two

years. The CAC/MDT must provide ongoing opportunities for professionals who conduct forensic interviews to receive specialized training. It is vitally important that forensic interviewers remain current on developments in forensic interviewing and other relevant fields of practice to further enhance their expertise.

### **Essential Component G**

Individuals who conduct forensic interviews must participate in a structured forensic interviewer peer review process a minimum of two times per year. Peer review serves as a quality assurance mechanism that reinforces the methodologies utilized and provides support and problem solving for participants.

Structured peer review includes:

1. Ongoing opportunities to network with, and share learning and challenges with, peers
2. Review and performance feedback on actual interviews in a professional and confidential setting
3. Discussion of current relevant research articles and materials and implications for forensic interview practice
4. Training opportunities specific to forensic interviewing of children and CAC-specific methodologies.

By passing HB 442, Maryland has an opportunity to strengthen protections for child victims and ensure that their voices are heard in a manner that upholds justice and their well-being. The rigorous training, continuing education, and peer review required of forensic interviewers demonstrate their expertise in conducting neutral, developmentally appropriate, and trauma informed interviews. Expanding the tender years hearsay exception to include statements made to these highly trained professionals will not only improve the integrity of child abuse investigations but also minimize the emotional toll on vulnerable children. I urge the committee to give HB 442 a favorable report to safeguard the rights and welfare of our youngest and most vulnerable victims.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Robin Grove  
Director, Child Advocacy Center of Frederick County