



Maryland Youth Advisory Council

c/o Governor's Office Children
100 Community Place,
Crownsville, MD 21032

Alex Hossainkhail, *Chair*

Thomas Evans, *Vice-Chair*
Folashade Epebinu, *Secretary*

February 4, 2025

Re: HB 293 | Criminal Procedures - Child Victims - Testimony in Child Abuse Cases

Dear Chair Clippinger and members of the Judiciary Committee,

The Maryland Youth Advisory Council prides itself on being a coalition of diverse young advocates and leaders who serve as a voice for youth in Maryland. As leaders in our communities, and as appointees of the Governor, President of the Senate, Speaker of the House, Maryland Association of Student Councils, Maryland Higher Education Commission, and the University System of Maryland, we take every opportunity to address relevant issues by influencing legislation, spreading public awareness and serving as a liaison between youth and policymakers regarding issues facing youth.

We are writing in support of **HB293** and requesting a favorable report by the committee. **HB0293** adjusts requirements for children victims, testifying in child abuse trials, to provide their testimony outside of the courtroom. This change will allow for an increase in children which are eligible for that right, reduce unneeded distress, and allow for a safer ability and environment to testify regarding their abuse.

Child abuse and neglect have been shown to levy severe, demonstrable effects on child development and wellbeing¹, namely, high-risk behavior, and distress of individuals/settings connected to their abuse. To ask child abuse victims to face their abuser in court while testifying would be afflicting avoidable suffering. According to the most recently available data, 6,564 children were victims of child maltreatment in the state of Maryland². **HB293** increases access to the alternative, out-of-court option of testifying, for more child abuse victims and relieves undue stress from said victims.

The council advocates for **HB293** as it aligns with the Council's Legislative Platform supporting:

- I. Initiatives designed to promote positive mental health and wellbeing in youth. (Article IV, Clause F), and
- II. Programs designed to promote positive relationships between youth and law enforcement. (Article V, Clause H).

HB293 takes down barriers to providing testimony for child abuse victims in Maryland. By broadening language and allowing more victims to qualify for this option, Maryland will be further supporting abuse

¹ World Health Organization <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/child-maltreatment>

² Maryland Child Welfare Outcomes Report
<https://cwoutcomes.acf.hhs.gov/cwodatasite/byState/maryland/>

victims through a tumultuous and very difficult part of their life, and contribute to a more successful future. For these reasons, the Maryland Youth Advisory Council **supports HB0293** and requests a favorable report from the committee. We thank you for doing your part to support victims of child abuse throughout the state.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Alex Hossainkhail". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "A" and a long, sweeping underline.

Alex Hossainkhail
Chair, Maryland Youth Advisory Council