

## **POSITION ON PROPOSED LEGISLATION**

BILL: House Bill 223 - Know Before They Knock

FROM: Elizabeth Van Horn, LCSW-C

POSITION: Favorable

DATE: February 13, 2025

Greetings,

My name is Elizabeth Van Horn and I am a Clinical Social Worker here in the State of Maryland in support of HB223, which is commonly referred to as the Know Before they Knock Bill. While I am a part of the Parental Defense Division within the Public Defender's Office of Maryland, I am offering testimony in my personal capacity to share insights gained during my longstanding career in the child welfare sector. Prior to my current position, I served as a family advocate in New York City for over ten years. Both there and here in Maryland, I've aided families as they've encountered the most uncertain times and challenging circumstances navigating the child welfare system. I firmly believe that families access necessary resources and adequate support when they are met with proper information, are given the opportunity to fully understand the process before them, and have the chance to seek clarity when needed.

Every family I've worked with has been deeply traumatized by the often volatile, divisive, and invasive process that an investigation brings. During these moments, parents are not sure what to say, do, or who to turn to for help. Information is often misconstrued and or miscommunicated during heightened moments of stress, leaving a family without a proper understanding of what is happening and why. Knowing, for example, that a parent has the ability to consult with an attorney provides an opportunity for that parent to seek support in understanding a very complex process, the legalese involved, and the reasoning behind what is being asked of them. Parents are often asked to sign documents they don't understand without direction on how it will be used during the course of an investigation. This often leads to distrust between the community at large and the entities seeking to support and protect children and their families.

As you can imagine, encounters with the child welfare system are equally challenging and nuanced and can totally overwhelm any family's ecosystem. Parents being provided information at the outset of an investigation about what their rights are strengths their ability to access resources and mitigate any concerns. It allows them to build a bridge of trust within the systems they are navigating and develop a clear path forward. I trust that children and their families will be safely and more thoroughly supported when they have the resources to do so which is why I am in full support of HB223.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Van Horn, LCSW-C