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January 21, 2025

Delegate Luke Clippinger

Delegate J. Sandy Bartlett

Judiciary Committee

100 Taylor Office Building

Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: HB 152 – Family Law - Child Custody Evaluators -Qualifications and Training Position: SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS

Dear Chair Clippinger, Vice-Chair Bartlett, and Members of the Committee:

The Maryland Psychological Association, (MPA), which represents over 1,000 doctoral level psychologists throughout the state, asks the House Judiciary Committee to **SUPPORT HB 152 WITH AMENDMENTS.**

Custody Evaluations are provided by mental health professionals with specialized education, training, and experience, and a number of psychologists in Maryland meet the stringent criteria necessary to provide these critical services to families. The MPA strongly supports the goal of ensuring that all professionals involved in custody evaluations have appropriate education and training including specialized knowledge in child development, family systems, intimate partner violence, child maltreatment, trauma, prevention of maltreatment, parenting, parent-child relationships, and family law, among others.

The training and qualifications required in this bill, however, are already required in Judicial Rule 9-205.3 (Custody and Visitation-Related Assessments) with the exception that HB 152 also requires:

- (F)(3) “training or experience in observing or performing custody evaluations” (page 3, lines 9/10);
- (F)(4)(iii) current knowledge and experience with “trauma and its impact on children and adults” (page 3, line 15).

The requirement for “training or experience in observing or performing custody evaluations” is confusing. It is not clear if the language requires “training...in observing...custody evaluations,” “training in performing custody evaluations” – which is already required, “...experience...performing custody evaluations” – which cannot be a requirement for individuals who have not yet performed custody evaluations, or something else. Therefore, the MPA suggests that (F)(3)lines 9 and 10, on page three be deleted.

In the event that the bill is not amended with this important change and clarification, then we would that the Committee move UNFAVORABLY on this bill.

If we can be of any further assistance as the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee considers this bill, please do not hesitate to contact MPA’s Legislative Chair, Dr. Stephanie Wolf, JD, Ph.D. at mpalegislativcommittee@gmail.com.

Respectfully submitted,

David Goode-Cross, Ph.D.

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President

Stephanie Wolf, JD, Ph.D.

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Chair, MPA Legislative Committee

cc: Richard Bloch, Esq., Counsel for Maryland Psychological Association
Barbara Brocato & Dan Shattuck, MPA Government Affairs