

**SB0770 – Public Schools and Youth Services – Crisis Support and Assistance and Workgroup Study**  
**Ways and Means Committee**  
**March 26, 2025**

**Position: SUPPORT**

**Center for Hope, LifeBridge Health supports SB0770 – Public Schools and Youth Services – Crisis Support and Assistance and Workgroup Study.**

Center for Hope, a subsidiary of the regional medical system LifeBridge Health, includes the third oldest nationally accredited child advocacy center in the nation and the first in Maryland. Since 2010, Center for Hope has trained professionals, youth-serving organizations, community members, and many others on violence intervention and prevention and how to protect the vulnerable. With pioneering approaches to preventing the abuse of children and youth, and youth-serving organizational policy development, Center for Hope's experts indirectly improve the lives of tens of thousands of people across the country each year. Center for Hope has studied the repeated failures of mandatory reporters and youth-serving organizations and understands the extent to which appropriate policies and education can improve outcomes for children and youth. Center for Hope has collaboratively assessed, designed, and assisted with the implementation of child and youth protection policies as well as training for institutions and organizations throughout the nation.

The original text of SB770 enhanced and expand systems to protect children from sexual abuse and sexual misconduct through several modifications to bills passed in 2018 (HB 1072) and 2019 (HB 486). These bills required Maryland public and private schools to train staff about sexual abuse and sexual misconduct, develop a code of conduct for school staff, and conduct pre-employment screening for acts of sexual abuse or misconduct during prior employment.

The amended version of SB 770 does the following:

- (1) Requires each local school system to provide crisis support and assistance to a public school when a teacher or other school employee is removed from the classroom or school due to alleged criminal activity or for student safety.
- (2) Requires MSDE to convene a workgroup to (a) examine the impact on public schools of adding history of boundary-violating behavior to the school hiring process, and (b) examine the impact on youth-serving organizations in the State of adding requirements for personnel hiring.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) states screening for child sexual abuse prevention should be integrated into the general screening and selection process that organizations already employ to choose the best possible candidates for positions. Youth-serving organizations need to know about an applicant's previous boundary issues, criminal histories of sexual offenses, violence against youth, and other violent criminal offenses. Youth-serving organizations must be able to assess the background and interests of applicants as early

and as fully as possible. It must be determined if adults have clear boundaries and ethical standards for their conduct with youth.

The organization's inquiry or request for a background check screening demonstrates the organization's seriousness about protecting children and youth and will discourage applicants at risk for perpetrating child sexual abuse. Research shows that a significant percentage of all cases of child sexual abuse occur through organizations that serve children and youth, including schools, child care centers, churches, sports clubs, and other youth-serving organizations. Perpetrators may seek employment with these organizations because they recognize the opportunity to be with children and to find a place to groom possible victims.

Hampered by inadequate access to complete employee background information, youth-serving organizations unwittingly hire staff accused of boundary issues or inappropriate behavior with children and youth. In some situations, employees who have been accused of boundary-violating behavior with children or youth are dismissed and the employer is not able to alert future employers.

The amended version of SB0770 is a start toward implementing SCCAN's recommendations by examining the effects of SCCAN recommendations on the public school system and on youth-serving organizations. We hope that the workgroup established by the bill is the first step toward implementing additional standards to protect children from sexual abuse in schools and youth-serving organizations.

**For all the above stated reasons, we request a favorable report for SB0770.**

For more information, please contact:

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