

## HOUSE BILL 951

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**POSITION: FAVORABLE FOR HB 951**

February 21, 2025

My name is Alison Healey. I am the State's Attorney for Harford County and a board member of the Maryland State's Attorney's Association (hereinafter MSAA). I am here today to offer my support for House Bill 951, as supported by MSAA.

The intent of the reportable offense statute under Education § 7-303 is to provide effective notification and communication with our school systems regarding juvenile offenses by students in an effort to allow the school system to protect the safety of all of the children entrusted to their care every day. After a series of cases this year, it has become abundantly clear that amendments are needed to this statute to protect the many, many children in our schools.

A 17-year-old Defendant in Harford County in one of my cases, brutally raped and killed Kayla Hamilton in July of 2022. While he was the primary suspect in the case, and the police "knew" it was him, they had to await DNA test results to file the charges against him. During the time those results were pending, he was able to enroll in both Lansdowne High School and then subsequently, Edgewood High School. Neither of those school systems were aware of the potential danger that he presented to their schools and students due to notification only being permitted in juvenile cases upon arrest and disposition. Thus, we were unable under the current law to notify the schools of the danger he presented and that he was a suspect in this heinous crime.

In order to prevent this danger reoccurring in the future, H.B. 951 would give State's Attorneys the authority to notify the superintendent of a school system or his/her designee, and only those individuals, if a juvenile is the suspect in a felony or crime of violence. H.B. 951 permits the State's Attorney to do so, but does not mandate it. This allows State's Attorneys to use discretion as to the reporting of these matters and to reserve it for cases where there is a true potential danger to the students in the school system.

In addition, H.B. 951 permits State's Attorney's to make the mandatory report to the school system on reportable offenses at the time of arrest, if they become aware that law enforcement has not done so. Currently, only law enforcement may make that report and in the event that the State's Attorney finds that the school has not been notified, they cannot simply make the report, they have to contact law enforcement telling them to contact the schools, making things much more complicated than is necessary. H.B. 951 simply updates this chain of communication in a way that would have no negative impact on any juvenile respondent in any way.

Lastly, H.B. 951 seeks to add additional offenses to the Reportable Offense list. The additional offenses are those that would indicate a potential danger to the many other students in the school system. They include: felonies, Production/Manufacturing of Child Pornography, 4<sup>th</sup> Degree Sex Offense, Visual Surveillance with Prurient Intent if the victim is a minor, Threats of Mass Violence, Revenge Pornography, and Stalking.

But why are these updates necessary to the Reportable List? To give you an example, in Harford County, a juvenile respondent was found responsible for Manufacturing of Child Pornography after forcing/enticing his toddler siblings to perform sexual acts on each other and filming it. Manufacturing of Child Pornography is not currently a reportable offense. As such, this respondent attends a local high school where there is a toddler/Pre-K program at the location. Certainly, it would be important for the school to know that this could be a potential risk in order to have the appropriate precautions in place in order to protect the students and toddlers in the like programs.

Threats of Mass Violence is likewise not currently a reportable offense. If a juvenile threatens a mass shooting at a school on social media, the school cannot legally be notified of the arrest for this charge, as it does not appear on the reportable offense list.

These are just a few examples of the reasons H.B. 951 is so important. Most notably, we are not dictating what the school must do with this information. Very simply, it is a bill of necessary notification and communication for the safety of all students. The schools need to have the

information to make appropriate decisions for all students. We cannot put juveniles who commit crimes above the safety of the thousands and thousands of students in our schools. Very simply put, all of our children must be safe, and House Bill 951 helps to ensure that safety of ALL children.

For these reasons, **I respectfully request a favorable report for House Bill 951.**