

HB1292

My name is Dr. Stephanie Wolf, I am a child and forensic psychologist here in Maryland. I am the President of Maryland Psychological Association, I am here to testify with strong support for HB1292

This Bill is VERY Doable:

I understand CACs. I worked for five years within a CAC, I also recently worked with a CAC and co-created a therapy program providing state of the art therapy services.

The opposition says the CACs are too different, housed in different structures to have a uniform requirement. While it may be true that they are different organizational structures there are fundamental similarities that make them CACs. To meet the definition of a CAC all CACs must either offer or have contractual relationships that offer medical, mental health, forensic and victim advocacy services. What these services look like are specifically spelled out by the National Children's Alliance. Thus, despite the differences across State CACs there are far more similarities. As such adding in a continuity of care requirement and reporting to the state with CAC's now - even collaborating closely with one helping to create a state-of-the-art therapy program. CACs are wonderful places. However, no place is infallible- not even CACs. CAC's can and have done harm. I was part of a terrible incident at a CAC in 2020 in which 5 therapists reported wrongdoing at a center and their employment was terminated. This resulted in 41 children suddenly losing their mental health providers. Last year the employment matter has been settled- our firings were changed to resignations we were compensated with back pay. the CAC did not admit they did anything wrong. I didn't need them

too. What I need is for oversight and a legislative fix to make sure kids are never put in this position again.

Abused Children suddenly lost their therapist

These children had been abused by parents, people they loved and people they trusted but had found a safe space with their therapist. The sudden loss of that therapist was like a surgeon leaving in the middle of a procedure. These children were likely left with the message that not only could they not trust whoever abused them, they couldn't even trust therapists and the centers that were supposed to help. The lack of required continuity of care plans at CAC's allowed this to occur.

These kids required more than just a new therapist. They required a goodbye with their old therapist, they required an understanding of what happened, and a new therapist trained in the treatment that they were receiving. None of these children received these basic tenets of mental health continuity of care. Us as providers tried to find help and follow best practices.

No one and no entity could help us

There was no specific place for the families to make complaints to. There was no place that could help us as providers. We contacted NCA, we contacted the Maryland Children's' Alliance, we contacted the psychology and social work boards, we contacted the media, the county council and even hired attorneys to help. No one could. No one was able to allow these children to have the option of discharge sessions, to know what happened and to continue care if they wanted.

This Bill is needed

This bill aims to provide much needed oversight to CACs. It will force strong policies to protect kids and providers. We learned from a report submitted in the Fall on this matter that only 2 of the 24 CACs even have a continuity of care plan. We also learned that out of the 24 CACs in the past 5 years all together they have only received 4 complaints in. This lack of complaints underlines that the mechanism is broken. It is beyond belief that with that many persons receiving services at a CAC only 4 patients would be unhappy. Reform is desperately needed. The legislation will provide tracking of problems, a mechanism for complaints and investigations. Most importantly this bill will make sure that the crucial work of taking care of vulnerable kids is always done with care and compassion and never causes destruction.

I leave you with one reminder. This bill was brought forth out of the loss of therapists that occurred to 41 children back in September of 2020. However, its purpose is to prevent such a loss for any child related to a child advocacy center in the future. For over 4.5 years no one has been able to do anything regarding these children. Now you have the choice to support this bill- Please do something.

