



TESTIMONY FOR SB0685 – Local School Systems – Sexual Abuse and Sexual Misconduct – Response Policy and After-Action Review – FAVORABLE

Bill Sponsor: Senator Gile

Committee: Education, Energy, and the Environment

Organization Submitting: Maryland Legislative Coalition

Person Submitting: Jessica Gorski, Executive Committee

Position: FAVORABLE

Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Jessica Gorski, and I am submitting this testimony in strong support of SB0685 on behalf of the Maryland Legislative Coalition. We are a statewide coalition of grassroots organizations representing more than 30,000 Marylanders across every legislative district. Our mission is grounded in the belief that government must safeguard the lives, health, and dignity of all Marylanders, especially children, who rely on schools and trusted adults to ensure their safety.

SB0685 advances that mission by strengthening Maryland’s response to sexual abuse and sexual misconduct within local school systems.

This bill requires the Maryland State Department of Education to develop a model sexual abuse and sexual misconduct response policy that includes specific, essential components. It further requires each local school system to adopt its own response policy by July 1, 2027, and to provide required notices and conduct after-action reviews when incidents occur. These measures create a consistent, statewide framework for prevention, reporting, and accountability.

These protections are urgently needed.

Schools are among the most important environments in a child’s life. When sexual abuse or misconduct occurs, or when warning signs are missed, the harm is profound and lasting. Yet Maryland currently lacks a uniform, statewide standard for how school systems must respond. This leads to inconsistent practices, uneven protections, and gaps that can leave children vulnerable.

SB0685 addresses these gaps by ensuring:

- Clear, consistent response protocols across all 24 local school systems.
- Mandatory notices so that families and appropriate authorities are informed promptly.
- After-action reviews that identify failures, strengthen future responses, and prevent repeated harm.
- A statewide model policy, ensuring that every district meets a baseline standard of safety and accountability.

The bill also acknowledges that local school systems will need time and support to implement these requirements, which is why the adoption deadline of July 1, 2027, is both reasonable and necessary. This approach balances urgency with practicality, ensuring that systems can build strong, sustainable policies.

SB0685 aligns squarely with the mission of the Maryland Legislative Coalition. It strengthens child protection, promotes transparency, and ensures that Maryland's public schools uphold the highest standards of safety. **No child should ever be placed in a school environment where sexual abuse or misconduct is mishandled, minimized, or ignored.**

We respectfully urge a FAVORABLE report on SB0685.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Jessica Gorski
Executive Committee
Maryland Legislative Coalition