

SB0650 - Family Law - Child Abuse and Neglect Investigations
("Know Before They Knock" Family Right to Notice Act)
Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

Position: OPPOSE

February 26, 2026

Dear Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and members of the Committee,

When I was 3 years old, my mother dragged me into the living room, tied me to a chair and screamed at me at the top of her lungs.

If you had asked my mother, she would have said she did it to keep me safe.

Ironic, right?

However, my mother was mentally ill, and my family needed an intervention. And she was not going to ask for one, and I was too scared to ask, at age 3.

Years later, when I ended up in a hospital emergency room because she had beaten me with a Billy club and my skull was gushing blood, the staff asked me who had hurt me. I told them it was a girl at my school. Why? Because my mother was sitting right there.

My point is this: I have never done anything scarier than to **finally** tell someone, at the age of 15, that my mother was abusing me. It's the law of the abusive household: Omertà. Don't tell...or else.

As you consider this bill, please ask yourselves one question: What is in the best interest of the child?

It strikes me that if we were talking about a woman getting beaten mercilessly by her husband, we wouldn't be asking ourselves whether or not the husband should be standing on the other side of the room, glaring at her threateningly as she tells her story to the police.

And yet, with this bill, we are expecting that child to somehow muster the courage, what I would call the superhuman courage, necessary to say something that could potentially cause the parent to seek retribution later?

I personally know children who have reported their parents to the authorities and who lived thorough even more abuse as a result.

If an abusive spouse lies about abuse, what makes us think an abusive parent won't?

My experience as an alumna of foster care, and as someone who is active in foster care alumni networks throughout this country, is that the only way an abusive parent can live with him or herself is to lie, even to himself or herself.

Yet, we ask Child Protective Service (CPS) workers to go into an impossible situation, to gather as much information as they possibly can, and to make the best decision in view of the child's needs.

This bill would not only make that information gathering well-nigh impossible.

When I think about what Maryland CPS workers have to see every day, for what they get paid every day, I wonder why anyone would want to make their jobs even harder.

To my mind, like CASA volunteers, social workers are the glue of our civilization. They intervene in situations that would most of us crumble.

CPS Workers and social workers have literally saved my life. They made it safe for me to talk.

And yet, when a child dies, we through these same child welfare professionals under the bus. When we don't give them enough money or resources to do their jobs, we call out DSS, or DHS, and we, "demand answers."

Shouldn't we be looking a bit deeper, at the chronic underfunding and misunderstanding of child welfare issues, particularly when it comes to foster care ?

The time to get answers, the time for an effective intervention, is precisely the moment that the first intervention happens, not when the process ends in - may God help us - the death of a child.

I thank the committee for the opportunity to state my position as someone who actually needed intervention as a child, and who, if this bill had been passed, might not be here today.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "S. Emfinger", written over a light pink rectangular background.

Susan L. Emfinger
Alumna of Foster Care

Appendix

The following CPS worker wage information is based on initial research I was able to discover today; however, I believe it bears further verification and careful study.

* MIT, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, runs a widely used Living Wage Calculator that estimates what someone actually needs to earn to cover basic costs like housing, food, transportation, and healthcare.

For Maryland, MIT estimates that a single adult with no children needs to earn about \$25.94 an hour to meet basic living expenses, which works out to roughly \$53,955 a year if working full time.

By comparison, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) reports that ***Social and Human Service Assistants, those who are often the front-line workers in CPS situations in Maryland***, earn a median wage of \$19.12 an hour, or about \$39,770 a year. That puts these workers more than \$14,000 a year below what MIT considers a bare-bones living wage.

Sources:

MIT Living Wage Calculator (Maryland): <https://livingwage.mit.edu/states/24>

U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics (Maryland): https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes_md.html