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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

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Child Advocacy Centers - Continuity of Care Standards for Health Care Professionals and Reports of Violations

Chair, Mr. Vice Chair and members of the esteemed members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 1292 Child Advocacy Centers - Continuity of Care Standards for Health Care Professionals and Reports of Violations.

Maryland has 24 Child Advocacy Centers, one in every county and Baltimore City, which provide critical services for some of Maryland's most vulnerable children; children who have experienced abuse or neglect. For over three decades, Child Advocacy Centers have been an integral part of Maryland's care network, and a crucial tool in fighting child abuse. Three years ago, this body set out on a journey of understanding when House Bill 1100 was introduced.

The bill would have required child advocacy centers to report annually to the Behavioral Health Administration certain information related to behavioral health care services provided at CACs. It would also have required the issuance of an annual report, and it would have authorized the Secretary of Health to investigate certain complaints related to child advocacy centers. This bill was the result of an ongoing dispute between a CAC and a behavioral health provider.

Although that bill did not ultimately pass and the dispute was resolved through other means, the work to understand the bill identified a more concerning and overarching issue - despite receiving significant state funding through the Governor's Office of Crime Prevention and Policy (GOCPP), these centers currently lack specific oversight or accountability mechanisms. Working with stakeholders during the 2025 session, this committee amended HB 1480 into a posture which passed unanimously from this committee and the House 137-1. House Bill 1292 is in the same posture as it passed out of the House in 2025.

I understand we have additional amendments which have been recommended by stakeholders in review of the language and are clarifying in nature. HB 1292 will establish oversight standards for Maryland's Child Advocacy Centers (CACs) shoring up the safety net for some of our most vulnerable children.

The bill requires GOCPP to collect complaints against the centers and produce an annual report, authorizing GOCPP to refer them to the Attorney General for further review, streamlining all complaints and response through GOCPP, aligning the process with the center's funding source. Additionally, the bill applies to individuals employed by the CACs, ensuring that the centers can be held accountable for their staff's actions and must ensure all providers of medical and mental health are licensed or certified by the appropriate health occupations board, providing a meaningful role of oversight to the state of Maryland while holding centers accountable to ensure quality and continuity of care.

HB 1292 is an essential step to ensure our most vulnerable children continue to receive the highest standard of care the CACs already maintain and ensure we are holding ourselves accountable to ensuring our state dollars are meaningfully supporting these individuals and for these reasons I ask for a favorable report on HB 1292