

## **POSITION ON PROPOSED LEGISLATION**

**BILL: SB0650 Know Before They Knock**

**FROM: Christina Hawkins**

**POSITION: Favorable**

**DATE: February 24, 2026**

I am respectfully requesting that the Committee issue a favorable report on Senate Bill 0650.

Senate Bill 0650 requires a local department of social services agency to provide a notice of rights to a parent of a child at a certain time during an investigation of suspected child abuse or neglect.

My name is Christina Hawkins and I am the Statewide Peer Support Manager for the Maryland Office of the Public Defender. In my role, I oversee a unit of Peer Support Specialists, all who have had lived experience with the child welfare system, incarceration, or substance use disorders- I assist individuals involved with our agency, navigate a system I once navigated myself.

Today, I am testifying on my own behalf, not as a representative of the Maryland Office of the Public Defender.

On February 23, 2018 a woman who identified herself as a CPS worker and a police officer knocked on my door. I answered the door and allowed these strangers into my home because I had no reason not to. I had been taught that police were here to protect and serve. I had never been in trouble with the law and had never had any contact with child protective services in the past.

The CPS worker said they were at my house because they had a report for suspicion of methamphetamine use. They did not ask me to take a drug test, nor had they taken one before. They looked around my house and found no risk of harm. My 3 year old daughter was laying on a made bed, in her own room, in the home that I owned. The case worker then walked outside and made a call. She came back in and said I had to sign a safety plan and agree to give custody of my child to someone else, or they were taking her to foster care. I began to panic. I didn't know that I was entitled to speak with an attorney, or that I had options and rights. I signed a 60 day safety plan that resulted in me being separated from my child for 3.5 years.

Parents are entitled to know they have the right to get advice from an attorney before signing away custody so they understand the risks involved in life changing legal matters. The department abuses their power by not informing parents of their rights and targets individuals who wouldn't know any better. If the law was that parents needed to be informed of their rights prior to CPS entering their home, on Feb 23, 2018, I would have been able to plan accordingly for my child in a way that didn't traumatize us. I would have been able to consult someone and find out exactly what was about to happen to my life.

Today I have 7 years clean, 4.5 years reunified- a milestone I was told I would never achieve- and I can tell you with certainty that the day my daughter was tragically pulled from my arms was the most confusing, emotional, and traumatic day of both of our lives. Today I work in a professional capacity to ensure that others don't face the same trauma that my daughter and I once had to.

For these reasons, I am requesting the committee issue a favorable report for SB650.

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