



DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

Wes Moore, Governor · Aruna Miller, Lt. Governor · Rafael López, Secretary

February 18, 2026

The Honorable William C. Smith, Jr., Chair
Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
11 Bladen Street
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

**RE: TESTIMONY ON SB 484 - CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT – DISCLOSURE OF
REPORTS AND RECORDS - POSITION: LETTER OF INFORMATION**

Dear Chair Smith and Members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee:

The Maryland Department of Human Services (DHS) thanks the Committee for its consideration and respectfully submits information for the committee's consideration for Senate Bill 484 (SB 484).

With offices in every one of Maryland's jurisdictions, DHS provides preventative and supportive services, economic assistance, and meaningful connections to employment development and career opportunities to assist Marylanders in reaching their full potential. Our Social Services Administration (SSA) oversees Maryland's Child Protective Services (CPS) program, which is affected by SB 484. This bill would establish a centralized intake system for child abuse and neglect reports, funneling reports through the DHS Central Office, as opposed to local departments of social services or law enforcement. The intent of the bill would positively impact Marylanders as it would enable faster and consistent response times when reports are made after business hours and on weekends.

Under the Moore-Miller Administration, DHS has been actively exploring the infrastructure and fiscal requirements for a centralized intake system. A centralized 24/7 reporting hotline for the entire state would further reinforce our efforts to be responsive and move with urgency. However, some elements of SB 484 have problematic intersections with existing federal and state statutory requirements and federal resources.

The legislation would jeopardize our federal Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) grant and Title IV-E Plan compliance. SB 484 mandates that all accepted reports be assigned "for investigation." Requiring investigations for all reports conflicts with [CAPTA Section 106\(a\)\(4\)](#) (42 U.S.C. 5106a) authorizing and encouraging Differential Response, known in Maryland as [Alternative Response](#), for low-risk reports. SB 484 removes DHS' ability to respond in non-investigatory ways in low risk cases when

families need the most support to keep children safe. Low risk cases do not require formal CPS investigations under current law, responsibly use state resources, and enable greater collaboration with families to keep children safely at home.

Proposed changes to Family Law Art. §5-704.2 regarding substance-exposed newborns also conflict with existing state statute. Family Law [§5-704.2\(h\)\(1\)\(2\)\(ii\)](#) requires the local department to assess the newborn and the family without requiring a CPS investigative finding. Current law emphasizes risk mitigation, prevention, and services. In contrast, SB 484 presumes child abuse or neglect. Mandating an investigatory response for substance-exposed newborns may also violate CAPTA under [42 U.S.C. §5106a\(b\)\(2\)\(B\)\(ii\)\(i\)](#).

Maryland's existing 1-800-91-PREVENT hotline is not centralized, and instead routes all Child Welfare and Adult Protective Services (APS) reports directly to each local department of social services. DHS experience leads us to keep both child and adult reports on the same intake line, minimizing confusion for reporters. The bill does not mention if or how APS reports would be included in the proposed centralized intake system. We are also concerned about how the bill would affect local departments of social services' engagement with local law enforcement during the reporting process. SB 484 removes the option for reporters to call police directly and strikes DHS duty to notify police of reports. These changes would reduce options in emergency situations.

We would like to thank Senator McKay for bringing forward SB 484. Establishing a centralized intake system for reporting is a shared goal of ours. We believe the bill needs further refinement so as to not have a negative impact on the Marylanders we serve. We look forward to working with the Senator and other stakeholders in the interim to make a centralized intake system a reality.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide our letter of information to the Committee for consideration during your deliberations. If you require additional information, please contact Justin Hayes, Acting Director of Government Affairs, at justin.hayes1@maryland.gov.

In service,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rafael López', is written over the typed name.

Rafael López
Secretary