



**Testimony Before the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
February 26, 2026**

Senate Bill 650: Family Law - Child Abuse and Neglect Investigations ("Know Before They Knock" Family Right to Notice Act)

****OPPOSE****

The National Association of Social Workers – Maryland Chapter represents over 3,000 social workers statewide. We oppose Senate Bill 650 because it would inadvertently undermine children’s safety. The bill grants no new substantive rights to parents or legal guardians. Instead, it compels Child Protective Services (CPS) caseworkers to present existing rights in a manner that mirrors a criminal investigation. Forcing CPS into a policing posture undermines the trust-based, family-engagement approach that is central to effective child welfare practice - and it disregards children’s rights as independent human beings entitled to safety and protection.

The history of child protection in the United States is sobering. Children were long viewed as the property of their parents rather than as individuals with rights. Even today, children remain the only class of people who may be legally struck, within limits. Before modern child protection laws in the 1960s, the prevailing norm that “what happens in the family stays in the family” routinely shielded abuse and neglect from scrutiny. Policies that delay investigations or deter timely contact with children echo that era. Rolling back child protection under the guise of parents’ “rights” places children at risk and moves Maryland backward.

While anyone may make a report to CPS, local departments screen every referral using standardized tools to determine whether it meets the legal threshold for investigation. When a report is accepted, Maryland law requires that the local department or law enforcement “set eyes” on the child and assess safety within 24 hours for alleged abuse, and within five days for neglect or mental injury. The reason for these timelines is that delay can be deadly.

Some parents’ rights advocates minimize neglect by characterizing it as merely a byproduct of poverty. That framing is inaccurate and harmful; most families living in poverty care for their children safely. Neglect, however, is a leading cause of child fatalities- more common than physical abuse- and days or weeks of delay can mean the difference between life and death. Requiring investigators to notify parents that they may refuse access to the child in response to a maltreatment report creates a serious and foreseeable risk to children’s safety.

Our NASW-MD members bring decades of public child welfare experience. The lurid portrayals of CPS you may hear - resembling made-for-TV melodrama - are not reflective of real practice. Caseworkers do not “ransack” homes or “strip-search” children. Those claims are inflammatory, one-sided, and simply false, apparently made for emotional impact.

In reality, most maltreatment reports reflect families in crisis. CPS interventions prioritize helping families - connecting them to community resources, using flexible funds to address urgent needs, and providing family support services. Maryland's outcomes demonstrate this approach works. The rate of repeat maltreatment within one year is low, and the family separation rate is extremely low - about 1.1 per 1,000 children, the second-lowest placement rate in the nation. These are achievements to be protected, not undermined.

The bill further suggests that exercising the prescribed "rights" may result in the filing of a petition to remove a child from the home. Removal should never be used as a threat or as a default response to noncooperation absent a demonstrable safety risk. Yet without the ability to speak with parents and interview children, risk cannot be assessed. This structure invites removals based on uncertainty and fear of liability, rather than on evidence-based safety assessments and reasonable efforts to preserve families - an outcome that harms children.

In short, Senate Bill 650 expands no new rights, but reframes child maltreatment investigations in a quasi-criminal manner that undermines family engagement and resurrects an outdated view of children as extensions of their parents rather than as individuals with independent rights to safety. Children cannot advocate for themselves. We urge you to oppose Senate Bill 650 on their behalf.

Respectfully,

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