

March 26, 2026

Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

HOUSE BILL 1292: Child Advocacy Centers – Continuity of Care Standards for Health Care Professionals and Reports of Violations

Position: Favorable

Dear Chairman Smith and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of LifeBridge Health's Center for Hope, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support amended House Bill 1292. LifeBridge Health's Center for Hope is a comprehensive violence intervention and prevention program that, in 2025 provided trauma informed crisis intervention and prevention services to more than 5,700 survivors and caregivers impacted by child abuse, domestic violence, and homicide. As Baltimore City's nationally accredited Child Advocacy Center (CAC), we helped over 1,500 children last year and collaborate daily with multidisciplinary partners to ensure child safety, investigative integrity, and access to appropriate care. As a critical part, and often unseen member of Maryland's broad child protection community, we appreciate the intent underlying HB1292 to promote continuity of care for children and accountability for all of Maryland's 24 Child Advocacy Centers. Continuity of care is a critical value we share and foundational to trauma informed practice.

Maryland's CACs already operate within a robust framework of oversight and accountability. Under Md. Code, Criminal Procedure § 11-928, CACs must meet national accreditation standards established by the National Children's Alliance (NCA). The US Department of Justice's Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention have endorsed these ten standards. Maryland has formally incorporated those standards into the statute. These standards are evidence based, nationally recognized, and include clear requirements related to organizational capacity, mental health services, medical evaluations, and coordination of care. Compliance is assessed through a rigorous accreditation and reaccreditation process every five years. In fact, Center for Hope recently passed its accreditation after a rigorous site review and evaluation of hundreds of pages of documents. A comprehensive review of these standards and the evidence behind them can be found at <https://ojjdp.ojp.gov/model-programs-guide/literature-reviews/childrens-advocacycenters>.

Helping children and caregivers heal from abuse and trauma is of critical importance for the child advocacy center. With thanks to philanthropic supporters and available government funds such as Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) grants, Center for Hope provided high quality free treatment for almost 150 clients equaling almost 3,000 sessions in FY24. Licensed healthcare professionals practicing within CACs remain subject to the full authority of their respective licensing boards and existing

state regulations governing ethical practice, client welfare, and continuity of care. These systems provide meaningful protections for children and families while allowing providers the clinical discretion necessary to respond to complex and sensitive circumstances.

Nonetheless, maintaining robust mental health practices is a challenge for any provider, let alone Maryland's various child advocacy centers. Recognizing that not all of Maryland's child advocacy centers have the same capacity for oversight and care that LifeBridge Health has invested in Center for Hope, we support the call for ensuring mental health care provided by a CAC meets acceptable standards and addresses the appropriate handoff towards a smooth transition when providers change.

Center for Hope discussed amendments to the original draft of HB1292 with the bill sponsors and appreciates the thoughtful consideration and understanding of how CACs function. These amendments as discussed with sponsors include:

- Clarifying that clinicians practicing under lawful supervision are included in the licensing provision.
- Expanding the confidentiality provision to reference HIPAA and other applicable federal and State confidentiality laws
- Refining the complaint reporting requirement so it applies when a determination has been made that a violation of CAC standards or applicable professional ethics occurred.
- Clarifying who retains discretion to determine safety and clinical appropriateness regarding termination sessions and provider contact.
- Ensuring that any public reporting of complaint information is appropriately limited to protect confidential medical and investigative information.

Center for Hope supports HB1292 as amended by the House with one additional technical amendment offered by bill sponsor to modify effect date from 2026 to 2027. Thank you for your consideration and for your continued commitment to protecting Maryland's children.

Respectfully submitted,

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