



Wes Moore, Governor · Aruna Miller, Lt. Governor · Gloria Brown Burnett, Interim Secretary

February 26, 2026

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

**RE: TESTIMONY ON SB 711 - FAMILY LAW - CHILD NEGLECT DEFINITION -
ALTERATION - 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 of Senate Bill 711 (SB 711).

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) implements the Prevention and Child Safety (PCS) program which is affected by SB 711. Child Protective Services (CPS), under the leadership of PCS, is responsible for investigating all reports of child abuse and neglect in Maryland. SB 711 proposes expanding the definition of neglect by a parent or guardian to include the failure or refusal to provide an education for a child in their care.

The Department takes child safety very seriously. However, we respectfully disagree that chronic absenteeism or truancy should be categorized as childhood neglect. There are various reasons why a child may not attend school, and the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) and local school systems already have the statutory authority and personnel to address attendance issues.


Altering the definition of child neglect would compel mandated reporters to make reports of said neglect to the Department, to which we would be obliged to respond. Immediately involving CPS based solely on a child's absence in school would be

counterproductive to our goal of emphasizing prevention services for families, and could increase trauma and distrust of social services agencies. In addition, we are mindful that research demonstrates that expanding mandated reporting requirements, especially for teachers, risks diverting resources from child abuse investigations.

[Education Article §7-301](#) already describes parental requirements for ensuring a child receives educational services and establishes specific penalties for non-compliance. Instead of expanding the definition of neglect to trigger future CPS investigations, DHS believes that an alternative, preventative approach leveraging existing community resources and the DHS Family Preservation program is a more effective and family-centered strategy.

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 blue ink that reads "Gloria Brown Burnett". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "G".

Gloria Brown Burnett
Interim Secretary