



February 26, 2026

The Honorable William C. Smith, Jr. Chair, Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee  
Miller Senate Office Building, 2 East Wing  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: OPPOSITION TO SENATE BILL 650 – Family Law - Child Abuse and Neglect  
Investigations (“Know Before They Knock” Family Right to Notice Act)

Dear Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and Members of the Judicial Proceedings  
Committee:

The Maryland Association of Social Services Directors (MASSD) respectfully submits the following unfavorable testimony for Senate Bill 650. While we support the principles of parental rights and transparent communication, the Maryland Supreme Court has been clear: the "sole and specific objective" of child welfare statutes is the protection of children—not the protection of those alleged to have abused them. This bill threatens to subvert that mission by establishing a policy where individual parental interests are placed in direct opposition to a child's right to be safe, creating significant barriers that may inadvertently leave vulnerable children at increased risk of harm. Furthermore, these mandates may have the unintended consequence of more children being removed from their parents and placed into foster care as departments struggle to verify safety through formal legal hurdles.

Our primary concerns, which align with the opposition from the Maryland State's Attorneys' Association (MSAA), are as follows:

#### 1. Compromising the Integrity of Investigations

SB 650 requires a local department or law enforcement agency to notify a parent or legal guardian of all allegations at the initial contact. As noted by the State's Attorney's Office, providing this "roadmap" to a potential maltreater can lead to witness tampering and the dissipation of evidence. By the time a department can obtain a court order to see a child after being refused entry, physical injuries may have healed, and a child victim may have been coerced into silence.

## 2. Delay of Critical Life-Safety Assessments

The bill shifts the on-site interview requirement following a report of suspected abuse from a "caretaker" to strictly a "parent or legal guardian". This restriction ignores the reality of emergency responses where a parent is unavailable, yet a child is in the immediate care of another adult. By notifying parents of their right to refuse entry or interviews, the bill creates a "chilling effect" that delays mandatory safety assessments.

This is especially concerning given our bifurcated response system. The vast majority of our cases are handled through Alternative Response (AR), which is designed specifically to be a collaborative, family-centered process. By design, a case only receives a Traditional Investigative Response (IR) when there is already an assessment of high risk or immediate danger. Imposing these specific notice requirements on IR cases—where safety concerns are already at their peak—could inadvertently compromise our ability to protect the most vulnerable children in Maryland.

To understand the life-or-death stakes of SB 650, we must look at Connecticut, which enacted a substantially similar "Miranda-style" warning law (Public Act 11-112) in 2011. The results were devastating:

**A 45% Increase in Fatalities:** Within just three years of implementing these parental warnings, Connecticut saw substantiated child maltreatment deaths rise from 11 in 2011 to 16 in 2014.

**A Shield for Maltreators:** In 2017, a 17-year-old with developmental delays died after his mother used these specific legal protections to "legally deny access" to investigators. Despite numerous welfare checks, investigators' hands were tied until it was too late.

**The Legislative Reversal:** By 2018, Connecticut was forced to pass a corrective law to bypass parental consent when there is "reason to believe" a child is in danger. SB 650 risks forcing Maryland into this same tragic cycle—passing a law that shields abusers today, only to repeal it after a preventable tragedy tomorrow

## 3. Creation of an Adversarial Environment

This legislation mandates a notice of rights far beyond those afforded to subjects of criminal investigations. Forcing social workers to lead with these warnings transforms a safety check into a high-stakes legal confrontation. This adversarial approach will likely lead to:

- **Increased Removals:** When parents are encouraged to withhold access, departments may have no choice but to file for emergency removal just to verify a child's safety.
- **Trauma to Innocent Families:** Many investigations are cleared quickly by speaking with the child. By prolonging this process through legal hurdles, we cause more harm to children who were not abused but must now endure an extended investigation.

## Conclusion

Child Protective Services' primary mission is to protect our most vulnerable community members. By prioritizing the rights of a suspected maltreater over the immediate safety of the

child, SB 650 undermines our ability to identify abuse, prevent additional harm to children and provide trauma-responsive services to victims.

For these reasons, the Maryland Association of Social Services Directors urges an unfavorable report on SB 650.

Sincerely,



Jenifer L. DuBosq, LCSW-C  
Chair of the Maryland Association of Social Services Directors

**Maryland Association of Social Services Directors**

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