

Bill Number: SB 650
Scott D. Shellenberger, State's Attorney for Baltimore County
Opposed

WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF SCOTT D. SHELLENBERGER,
STATE'S ATTORNEY FOR BALTIMORE COUNTY,
IN OPPOSITION TO SENATE BILL 650
FAMILY LAW – CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT INVESTIGATIONS

I write in opposition to Senate Bill 650 Child Abuse and Neglect Investigations.

Senate Bill 650 proposes major changes in the field of the investigation of child abuse and neglect cases, both criminal and civil. SB650 creates more rights in an investigation of these cases that goes far beyond what the Constitution requires. SB650 mainly effects the requirements for taking statements and collecting evidence. It places social workers who investigate child abuse and neglect cases in the role of a police officer.

This Bill would put children in danger by delaying the investigation and limit what evidence can be collected. SB650 gives more rights to those being investigated than Defendants have in criminal cases. That is true even if you are talking to the non-offending parent.

The practical effects of this legislation will have wide-sweeping detrimental impacts to protecting the safety and well-being of children in Maryland. In addition to delaying the assessment of a child's well being, this legislation will lead to more removals of children from homes which will increase the trauma experienced by those children who have already suffered abuse or neglect. When investigators cannot be assured of the safety of children, they will error on the side of safety. Therefore, removal will happen more often. Furthermore, this legislation will have an impact on the ability of investigators to determine what actually happened, potentially leaving a child in a dangerous situation without access to justice or safety.

I urge an unfavorable report. These changes will put children at risk.