

## HB 1005 FAV Melissa Wesner / LifeSpring Counseling Services

### Adult Survivor Reporting Testimony

My name is Melissa Wesner, and I'm a Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor who is licensed in Maryland.

I am in favor of HB1005 as a step forward in addressing the very real and unaddressed concerns with Maryland's Adult Survivor Guidelines and **Reporting Processes**.

When individuals are abused and neglected, their power, control, and autonomy are taken away from them. When adult survivors make the brave decision to seek therapy, they are met with unfortunate news in their very first session where they are told that their therapist will have to break their confidentiality and file a report if they provide identifiable information about suspected child abuse or neglect. **It doesn't matter if the abuser is deceased, nor does it matter if the adult survivor is OK with that information being reported. Once again, due to this law, adult survivors' voice, rights to privacy, and personal agency are taken away from them.** **The impact of this** ranges anywhere from: trauma survivors dissociating in session, clients dropping out of therapy, clients getting upset when their therapist has to file a report, and/or filtering one's speech in a place where they should be able to speak freely in the pursuit of healing.

**The current administrative process for filing an adult survivor report is sloppy, fragmented, and unclear.**

1. At this time, there is **no Adult Survivor Reporting FORM**. Mandated reporters must take the child abuse report and write Adult Survivor at the top.
2. **There is also no streamlined system across the state of Maryland for making these reports.** Each county has a different process. Most recently, providers needing to file adult survivor reports in Baltimore City have been instructed to call Baltimore City 911 where we get to tie up the emergency lines for a call that is most certainly not an emergency. Additionally, it then becomes clear that no effort has been put into educating the public about changes. When we call Baltimore City 911, the dispatchers and their supervisors tell us that they have received no training on this topic. They ask us if we need them to order a wellness check, and we confirm that we do not as that would only cause more harm.
3. **Current guidelines say that mandated reporters are to contact the "local offices."** When it comes to adult survivors, the question becomes **WHERE IS THE LOCAL OFFICE?** Do we call the local office where my office is located? Do I call the office that is local to where my adult client lives? Do I call the local office wherever the abuse occurred? And if so, how exactly will I know which office that is when my adult client is unlikely to spell out the address where the abuse occurred as they don't want this report filed in the first place. If I have to file the report in another state, I will likely call only to be told that this state does not accept adult survivor reports. I'm just wasting my time.

4. **When it comes to adult survivor reporting, we need an actual form, a streamlined system, and clarity on WHERE we are to file.**

**Most importantly, we need a law and system that will respect the rights and wishes of adult survivors.**