

February 24, 2026

**SB0650 - Family Law - Child Abuse and Neglect Investigations  
("Know Before They Knock" Family Right to Notice Act)  
Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee  
February 26, 2026**

**Position: OPPOSE**

Submitted by:  
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Dear Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and members of the Committee,

My name is Jennifer Stine, and I am the Executive Director for CASA of Baltimore County. On behalf of the Baltimore County Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) program, **I am respectfully requesting that the committee return an unfavorable report on SB0650.**

Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) programs recruit, screen, train, and support volunteers who are appointed by the Courts to advocate on behalf of the best interests of children in foster care.

The intent behind SB0650 is an important and positive one – to ensure that parents and legal guardians are aware of their rights when a Child Protective Services representative is investigating a report of child abuse or neglect. We absolutely support that intended goal. In our work advocating for the best interests of children, we engage with parents and guardians as much as possible, and we often advocate for services for them as well, as helping the family will almost always benefit the child. We also know that parents and guardians do not always understand the process when dealing with the Department of Social Services, and we agree that information on that process – and their rights within it – is extremely important to share with them.

**However, this effort must not result in children being less safe and without protection.** We believe that section (E)(1)(IV), which states,

“The parent or legal guardian is not required to allow the employee of the Department or the Local Department to interview or examine a child, unless the interview or examination is ordered by a court or is required under subsection (C) or (K) of this section;”

puts children’s safety at risk. If, despite existing law stating that the Department “shall...see the child...decide on the safety of the child and other children in the household,” this section allows parents and guardians to refuse to let the Department meet with the child, it directly contradicts the Department’s mandate to ensure that a child is safe. For young or disabled children in particular, who may be unable to speak for themselves, this is especially

concerning. In many cases, even those of neglect (national child fatality data shows that approximately 78% experienced neglect), time is of the essence. It is critical that a professional be able to see the child and assess their safety within the timeframes already established. Allowing a parent to refuse this initial check puts children at significant risk.

Finally, this section creates a situation where not only are children not protected, but the encounter with social services becomes necessarily adversarial and can lead to additional trauma for the child and family, as well as unnecessary removals. If a Department employee is concerned for the welfare of a child and is unable to speak with that child, it dramatically increases the chances of police getting involved, which is almost always traumatic for the child. The inability to assess the situation may also mean that, rather than leaving a child to be possibly further harmed, the Department may choose to remove the child. The removal of a child from their home is *always* traumatic to the child and family, and local Departments typically try to avoid that last-resort approach (Maryland has the second-lowest removal rate in the country). However, implementation of this section of the bill would likely result in a drastic increase in unnecessary removals.

For all of these reasons, and above all, for the safety of children, CASA of Baltimore County opposes Senate Bill 0650 and respectfully requests an unfavorable report from the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee.

Thank you for your consideration,



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*Voices for Children*

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*Member of the National CASA Association*