

THE COALITION TO PROTECT MARYLAND'S CHILDREN

Our Mission: To combine and amplify the power of organizations and citizens working together to keep children safe from abuse and neglect. We strive to secure budgetary and public policy resources to make meaningful and measurable improvements in safety, permanence, and wellbeing.



HB0137- Family Law – Child Custody Evaluators –Qualifications **House Judiciary Committee** **January 29, 2026**

Position: SUPPORT

The Coalition to Protect Maryland’s Children is a consortium of organizations and individuals formed in 1992 who are concerned about the care of Maryland’s most vulnerable children and work together to promote meaningful child welfare reform. CPMC urges a favorable report on HB0137 - *Family Law – Child Custody Evaluators – Qualifications*.

HB0137 seeks to establish qualifications and training for professionals appointed or approved as child custody evaluators by the court, as well as eligibility to provide expert evidence in custody or visitation proceedings that include allegations of child maltreatment. Judges often rely on the assessments made by child custody evaluators in court proceedings. Ensuring proper qualifications, experience and training of custody evaluators – on childhood development, trauma, various types of child abuse and neglect and investigations, as well as the dynamics of domestic violence – is central to the very standard judges use to decide custody, i.e., “the best interest of the child”. The proposed training includes critical science about early childhood brain development, how traumatic events impact this development, state-investigatory processes and their limits, interpersonal dynamics that contribute to abusive behavior, the validity of and need for risk assessments, and preventive measures to mitigate abuse.

The bill stems from the recommendations of the Workgroup to Study Child Custody Court Proceedings Involving Child Abuse or Domestic Violence Allegations, which was established by SB 567 in the 2019 session. The Workgroup issued its 140-page report in September 2020 adopting over 20 recommendations.¹ As of October 1, 2025, Maryland Rules of Procedure adopted updated language regarding continuing education, certification, and knowledge topics including sexual abuse reflected in this bill (Rule 9-205.3).²

CPMC supports measures designed to improve the legal system’s ability to appropriately and effectively intervene and prevent child abuse and neglect. It is for this reason that the Coalition to Protect Maryland’s Children **urges a favorable report** on HB0137 - *Family Law – Child Custody Evaluators – Qualifications*.³

¹https://dls.maryland.gov/pubs/prod/NoPblTabMtg/CmsnChdAbuseDomViol/FinalReport_Workgroup_to_Study_Child_Custody_Court_Proceedings_Involving_Child_Abuse_or_Domestic_Violence.pdf

²<https://govt.westlaw.com/mdc/Document/N6D5648B1780B11F0B25FEA2E94F53678?contextData=%28sc.Default%29&transitionType=Default>

³ Members of CPMC represented by this written testimony include American Academy of Pediatrics - MD Chapter, Center for Hope, Child Justice, Court Appointed Special Advocates (MD CASA), Court Appointed Special Advocates (Baltimore County), Maryland Association of Resources for Families and Youth (MARFY), National Association of Social Workers - MD, State Council on Child Abuse and Neglect, and individual members of the coalition.