



January 29, 2026

Re: House Bill 137 – Family Law – Child Custody Evaluators – Qualifications  
SUPPORT

Chair Bartlett, Vice Chair Davis, and Members of the House Judiciary Committee:

My name is Eileen King. I am the Founder, Executive and Program Director of Child Justice, a Maryland legal services nonprofit dedicated to protecting children in custody and protective order cases that involve child abuse and family violence, including coercive control. We do not charge for any of our legal or other services.

January 2026 marks 30 years that I have been involved in supporting hundreds of protective parents and vulnerable children, many of whom experienced extreme trauma during these child court proceedings involving allegations of domestic abuse and child abuse.

***When we know better, we do better!***

Child Justice, Inc. strongly supports HB 137, legislation that ensures child custody evaluators meet certain professional qualifications and training with experience in the topics of domestic and family violence, child neglect and abuse including sexual abuse, and trauma and its impact on children and adults.

Child Justice urges a favorable report on HB 137.

Over the years, the need for this child protection legislation has significantly grown as I reflect on my early years as an advocate for abuse survivors in 1995 working with the Washington, DC-based American Coalition for Abuse Awareness, and fast forwarding to the many difficult child custody cases handled by Child Justice. I can point to many cases where a trained and qualified child custody evaluator would have made all the difference in the safety and life of a child.

I recall a Maryland custody evaluator's report that the child's disclosure of sexual abuse by his stepfather should not be taken seriously. The protective father was a member of the DC Foam Unit which extinguished the Pentagon roof fire on 9/11. On the one-year anniversary of 9/11, he was in family court, hoping to protect his son instead of being honored for his heroic work on this 9/11 Anniversary. He told me that he was trained to fight fires and save people, but no one had ever prepared him for the agony of trying to protect his son – and failing.

In another case, the custody evaluator rejected the child's disclosure of her father allegedly ejaculating on her while she was in bed but not asleep, and aware of him standing next to her bed.

In his 2024 testimony, Child Justice’s Legal Director Paul Griffin referenced a current case with a photo and testified: “The custody evaluator – whose counsel for the victim was assured by the judge appointing her that she was well trained in domestic violence and child abuse – REFUSED TO CONSIDER a key photograph depicting horrific facial and body injuries to the mother. She deemed it “irrelevant” because the domestic violence occurred before the custody order. She took this position despite it being contrary to the law in Maryland, the science associated with family violence and common sense.

And I will never forget when Hera McLeod, mother of Prince McLeod Rams, called me in August 2012 to say “I know he is going to kill my son”, which the father indeed perpetrated in October of 2012. This is an example of another custody evaluation that did not help protect a child.

Child Justice was honored to serve on the Workgroup to Study Child Custody Court Proceedings Involving Child Abuse or Domestic Violence Allegations in 2019 with a final report issued in 2020. The Workgroup issued a 140-page report in which it adopted 20 recommendations. including requiring training of judges and child custody evaluators in child custody cases involving child abuse or domestic violence.

We were encouraged when the Maryland General Assembly approved Senate Bill 17/House Bill 561 of 2022, requiring training for judges and magistrates presiding over child custody cases involving child abuse or domestic violence, which was based on Recommendation #8 in the Workgroup’s Final Report.

HB 137 is based on Recommendation #14, which recognizes that judges give significant weight to the recommendations of child custody evaluators. Child Justice was encouraged when the Maryland Judiciary updated Rule 9-205.3 effective in October and included many of the provisions of this legislation.

HB 137 will also pave the way for additional funding for Maryland via Kayden’s Law, enacted with the Violence Against Women’s Act reauthorization in 2022.

Passing this bill lets your constituents know you heard and respect their concerns and that their children’s lives and well-being count!

***When we know better, we do better!***

Child Justice strongly urges this Committee to extend its good work on judicial training and ensure that child custody evaluators are as well-trained as judges and give a favorable report to HB 137.

Respectfully submitted,

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