



THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

**Sponsor Testimony**

**Delegate Aaron Kaufman**

**HB 137 Child Custody Evaluators**

**Hearing Date: 1/29**

Good afternoon Chair Bartlett, Vice Chair Davis, and members of the Judiciary Committee. My name is Delegate Aaron Kaufman, and I am here to request a favorable report on HB 137, legislation that establishes clear, statewide qualifications and training requirements for child custody evaluators appointed by Maryland courts.

In contested custody and visitation cases, judges often rely heavily on custody evaluators to assess family dynamics, child safety, and allegations of abuse. Despite the significant weight courts place on these evaluations, Maryland law currently does not set uniform standards for who may serve as a custody evaluator or what training they must complete.

Research shows this gap has real consequences. National and international reporting has documented cases in which unqualified or under-trained evaluators failed to recognize domestic violence, misapplied discredited theories, or minimized coercive control, leading to unsafe custody outcomes.

Maryland's own Workgroup to Study Child Custody Court Proceedings Involving Child Abuse or Domestic Violence found that inconsistent evaluator qualifications and insufficient training contributed to



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failures to properly assess abuse and protect children.<sup>1</sup> This is an issue that is affecting Americans nationwide, as the American Society for the Positive Care of Children (American SPCC) has reported through its National Child Maltreatment Statistics webpage from 2023. According to their data, “89% of victims are maltreated by one or both parents, and 81.5% of child fatalities involve at least one parent.” (2023)<sup>2</sup>. In the state of Maryland’s framework, the Maryland Department of Health Child Fatality Review from 2022 reports that, “Among the 184 child deaths that occurred in 2021, local CFR teams reported 19 deaths (10%) resulting from confirmed abuse or neglect, the same number of deaths as in 2020. Teams incorporated information from autopsy records, DSS findings, and police investigations. Members of the local CFR team shared their findings, which determined that child abuse or neglect was indicated in the incident that led to the child’s death.”<sup>3</sup> On a more local note, there is one case that takes places in Montgomery County, where “Cynthia Moore a mother of seven children was convicted of six counts of child neglect, with one of her seven minor children, a teenager, died weighing 79 pounds”<sup>4</sup>. The evidence portrays the need to ensure child custody evaluators have the training and expertise that Maryland families deserve to ensure the safety of children in the midst of child custody cases. .

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<sup>1</sup> MARYLAND WORKGROUP TO STUDY CHILD CUSTODY COURT PROCEEDINGS INVOLVING CHILD ABUSE OR DOMESTIC VIOLENCE (Botts et al. 2020)  
[https://dls.maryland.gov/pubs/prod/NoPblTabMtg/CmsnChdAbuseDomViol/FinalReport\\_Workgroup\\_to\\_Study\\_Child\\_Custody\\_Court\\_Proceedings\\_Involving\\_Child\\_Abuse\\_or\\_Domestic\\_Violence.pdf](https://dls.maryland.gov/pubs/prod/NoPblTabMtg/CmsnChdAbuseDomViol/FinalReport_Workgroup_to_Study_Child_Custody_Court_Proceedings_Involving_Child_Abuse_or_Domestic_Violence.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Child maltreatment statistics. American SPCC. (2025, November 11).  
<https://americanspcc.org/child-maltreatment-statistics/>

<sup>3</sup> Maryland State Child Fatality Review Team 2020 Annual legislative report. (n.d.).  
[https://dlslibrary.state.md.us/publications/Exec/MDH/FHA/HG5-704\(b\)\(12\)\\_2020.pdf](https://dlslibrary.state.md.us/publications/Exec/MDH/FHA/HG5-704(b)(12)_2020.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Maryland woman gets 21 years for child neglect - The Washington Post. (n.d.-b).  
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/dc-md-va/2025/02/28/maryland-child-neglect-sentence/>



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This legislation is also the product of extensive collaboration with the Maryland Judiciary and legislative stakeholders. Over the past several sessions, members of the House and Senate worked closely with Judge Kathleen Dumais and the Judiciary to update Rule 9-205.3, which governs the appointment and qualifications of child custody evaluators. HB 137 reflects those updated standards and places them into statute to ensure consistency, transparency, and durability across Maryland courts. This bill directly addresses those failures. It requires court-appointed custody evaluators to hold an appropriate mental-health license, including licensure as a psychologist, psychiatrist, clinical social worker, clinical marriage and family therapist, or clinical professional counselor. It mandates that evaluators complete a court-approved training program covering domestic violence, child abuse, including sexual abuse trauma, child and adult development, disability-related issues, and family dynamics. The bill also requires ongoing continuing education to ensure evaluators remain current in evidence-based practices.

By setting these specific requirements in statute, the bill promotes consistency across jurisdictions, supports judges with more reliable evaluations, and helps ensure that custody decisions involving allegations of abuse are informed by professionals with the appropriate expertise. While Judiciary Rules carry the force of law, families and advocates have consistently called for these protections to be clearly codified in statute, just as the General Assembly did in 2022, when it required specialized training for judges presiding over custody cases involving abuse.

Additionally, this legislation aligns with the federal *Violence Against Women Act Reauthorization Act of 2021*, which emphasizes trauma-informed, evidence-based responses to domestic violence and child

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abuse in custody proceedings.<sup>5</sup>

By requiring custody evaluators to have appropriate licensure and training in abuse dynamics and trauma, this bill supports the federal policy goal of ensuring that custody decisions prioritize child safety and survivor protection.

For these reasons, I respectfully request a favorable report on HB 137. Thank you, and I am happy to answer any questions.

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<sup>5</sup> H.R. 1620 Violence Against Women Act Reauthorization Act Of 2021 (117th Congress)  
<https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/1620/text#toc-H6EDA4A7B37F649DDA76160A44E61B3BF>



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**Footnotes**

1. Maryland Workgroup To Study Child Custody Court Proceedings Involving Child Abuse Or Domestic Violence (Botts Et Al. 2020)  
[https://dls.maryland.gov/pubs/prod/NoPblTabMtg/CmsnChdAbuseDomViol/FinalReport\\_Workgroup\\_to\\_Study\\_Child\\_Custody\\_Court\\_Proceedings\\_Involving\\_Child\\_Abuse\\_or\\_Domestic\\_Violence.pdf](https://dls.maryland.gov/pubs/prod/NoPblTabMtg/CmsnChdAbuseDomViol/FinalReport_Workgroup_to_Study_Child_Custody_Court_Proceedings_Involving_Child_Abuse_or_Domestic_Violence.pdf)
2. H.R. 1620 Violence Against Women Act Reauthorization Act Of 2021 (117th Congress)  
<https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/1620/text#toc-H6EDA4A7B37F649DDA76160A44E61B3BF>
3. Child maltreatment statistics. American SPCC. (2025, November 11).  
<https://americanspcc.org/child-maltreatment-statistics/>
4. Maryland State Child Fatality Review Team 2020 Annual legislative report. (n.d.).  
[https://dlslibrary.state.md.us/publications/Exec/MDH/FHA/HG5-704\(b\)\(12\)\\_2020.pdf](https://dlslibrary.state.md.us/publications/Exec/MDH/FHA/HG5-704(b)(12)_2020.pdf)
5. Maryland woman gets 21 years for child neglect - The Washington Post. (n.d.-b).  
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/dc-md-va/2025/02/28/maryland-child-neglect-sentence/>