



**February 19, 2026**

**RE: SUPPORT— HB890 “Know Before They Knock” Family Right to Notice Act**

Dear Delegate Crutchfield and members of the House Judiciary Committee,

This testimony is submitted by Civil Rights Corps (CRC), a civil rights organization dedicated to challenging systemic injustice in the United States legal system, in support of HB890. CRC specializes in innovative, systemic challenges to civil rights violations using litigation, advocacy, and public education. Since its founding in 2016, the organization has developed pathbreaking legal challenges to pretrial detention practices; debtors’ prisons; prosecutorial misconduct; corporate and municipal profiteering from family separation in jails; and other practices that punish people for poverty and unnecessarily separate families. These legal cases—and related policy collaboration with state supreme courts, rulemaking bodies, attorney generals, federal government officials, legislators, local presiding judges, and others—have resulted in widespread changes in how the so-called justice system treats some of the most marginalized people in our society.

For several years, CRC has researched and engaged in advocacy related to the Maryland child welfare system, also known as the family regulation system.<sup>1</sup> We submit this testimony in support of HB890, with firsthand knowledge that Maryland families are subjected to intense surveillance and mired in onerous requirements when Child Protective Services knocks on their doors. HB890 is one change that would reduce the procedural opacity that prevents parents from understanding and asserting their rights.

CRC supports a family welfare system that eschews punitive investigations and harmful separations in favor of meeting families’ material needs and supporting them where they are at. HB890 does not purport to redesign the family regulation system. Rather, this bill is a practical proposal to inform parents of the rights that exist in a system that is stacked against them—a system that CRC hopes to help transform. HB890 helps ensure cash-poor families targeted by the system are aware of their legal rights. The strongest predictors of who will be subjected to a family regulation system report are synonymous with poverty and racism. Investigated families are those who are food-insecure, have difficulty paying rent and utilities, and experience public benefit shortages.<sup>2</sup> These are not abusive families—these are economically-neglected families. In Maryland, thousands of families face economic neglect and are therefore at risk of foster

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout our testimony, we will use the term “family policing” or “family regulation” system to describe what has been most commonly referred to as the “child welfare” or “child protection” system, to honor the ways directly impacted people describe this system and in recognition of the system’s racist history and the harm and trauma caused by forced family separation.

<sup>2</sup> Slack, K. S., Berger, L. M., DuMont, K., Yang, M.-Y., Kim, B., Ehrhard-Dietzel, S., & Holl, J. L. (2011). Risk and protective factors for child neglect during early childhood: A cross-study comparison. *Children & Youth Services Review*, 33(8), 1354-1363. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chilyouth.2011.04.024>



system involvement. In 2022, 17% of Maryland children had working parents living below 200% of the federal poverty line,<sup>3</sup> and in Baltimore, poverty rates for school-age children regularly exceed the national average.<sup>4</sup> Enacting HB890 will equip the parents and children who are most likely to be faced with family regulation system investigation with basic information about their legal rights—though all they need is support and material resources.

The “Know Before They Knock” Family Right to Notice Act will also act as a safeguard to Black and non-white families who disproportionately face the foster system. Similar to the criminal legal system, the family regulation system subjects Black, Indigenous, and Latine people to a greater likelihood of surveillance, more reports to the family police, more investigations, more forced family separation, and more terminations of parental rights. Nationally, one in two Black children will experience a family policing investigation.<sup>5</sup> One in ten will experience family separation.<sup>6</sup> One in 41 will have their parents’ rights terminated.<sup>7</sup> This racial disproportionality persists in Maryland. Although Black children make up less than one-third of the state’s child population, 53% of children who entered the foster system in Maryland in 2023 were Black.<sup>8</sup> This is deeply troubling, especially when considering that the foster system is not a utopic safe haven but often the locus of danger and trauma. For example, a study of the Baltimore foster system found that sexual abuse in foster placements was substantiated at four times the rate of the general population.<sup>9</sup> HB890 can help protect Black, Latine and Indigenous families from the trauma of separation.

Finally, CRC supports the “Know Before They Knock” Family Right to Notice Act because it could prevent invasive and hugely consequential investigations that can lead to the evisceration of one of the most precious fundamental rights—the right to family integrity. Federal law consistently affirms the right of family integrity and the reciprocal rights for parents

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<sup>3</sup> “Children in low-income working families by age group in Maryland.” *Kids Count Data Center*, Annie E. Casey Foundation, February 2025.

<https://datacenter.aecf.org/data/tables/5048-children-in-low-income-working-families-by-age-group?loc=1&loct=2#detailed/2/22/false/2545.1095.2048.1729.37.870.573.869.36.868/34.35.36/11455.11456>

<sup>4</sup> Annie E Casey Foundation, A profile of Youth and Adults in Baltimore, *available at*, [https://www.aecf.org/blog/a-profile-of-youth-and-young-adults-in-baltimore#:~:text=Poverty%20increased%20among%20Baltimore's%20school.and%20U.S.%20\(19%25\)%20rates.](https://www.aecf.org/blog/a-profile-of-youth-and-young-adults-in-baltimore#:~:text=Poverty%20increased%20among%20Baltimore's%20school.and%20U.S.%20(19%25)%20rates.)

<sup>5</sup> Kim, Hyunil, et al. “Lifetime Prevalence of Investigating Child Maltreatment among Us Children.” *American Journal of Public Health*, U.S. National Library of Medicine, Feb. 2017, [pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC5227926/](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC5227926/).

<sup>6</sup> Minoff, Elisa, and Alexa Citrin. “Systemically Neglected.” *Center for the Study of Social Policy*, Mar. 2022, [cssp.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Systemically-Neglected-How-Racism-Structures-Public-Systems-to-Preduce-Child-Neglect.pdf](https://cssp.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Systemically-Neglected-How-Racism-Structures-Public-Systems-to-Preduce-Child-Neglect.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> “Racial Justice.” *Children’s Rights*, 22 Oct. 2024, [www.childrensrights.org/focus-areas/racial-justice](https://www.childrensrights.org/focus-areas/racial-justice).

<sup>8</sup> Williams, S. C., Rosenberg, R., & Martinez. “State-level data for understanding child welfare in the United States - Child trends.” *ChildTrends*, 5 Sept. 2025, <https://www.childtrends.org/publications/state-level-data-for-understanding-child-welfare-in-the-united-states>.

<sup>9</sup> Trivedi, Shanta. “The Harm of Child Removal.” *NYU Review of Law & Social Change* 43(3) 523, 542 (2019).



and children to be together.<sup>10</sup> Yet, families are not even afforded minimal procedural protections when the family regulation system knocks on their doors. HB890 is an important first step to protecting our most marginalized families.

We hope that the Judiciary Committee acts on this opportunity to protect marginalized families, and that this bill will help the Maryland legislature shift its focus away from systems that police families and towards systems that support families.

Sincerely,

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<sup>10</sup> The right to family integrity is one of the most important rights protected by the federal Constitution. One hundred years ago, the Supreme Court acknowledged the right of a fit parent to raise her children free from unjustified state intervention; it held that the “liberty” contemplated by the Due Process Clause includes the right of parents to “establish a home and bring up children” (and, therefore, the right “to control the education of their own”). *Meyer v. Nebraska*, 262 U.S. 390, 399, 401 (1923). Two years later, the Court reiterated that the “liberty of parents and guardians” includes the right “to direct the upbringing and education of children under their control.” *Pierce v. Society of Sisters*, 268 U.S. 510, 534–535 (1925). The Court later affirmed that it is “cardinal with us that the custody, care and nurture of the child reside first in the parents, whose primary function and freedom include preparation for obligations the state can neither supply nor hinder.” *Prince v. Massachusetts*, 321 U.S. 158, 166 (1944) (considering the intersection between parental rights and religious freedoms). This fundamental right is reciprocal: “[T]he child and [their] parents” both “share a vital interest in preventing erroneous termination of their natural relationship.” *Santosky*, 455 U.S. at 760; *Berman v. Young*, 291 F.3d 976, 983 (7th Cir. 2002), *as amended on denial of reh’g* (June 26, 2002) (“Parents have a fundamental due process right to care for and raise their children, and children enjoy the corresponding familial right to be raised and nurtured by their parents”); *Jordan ex rel. Jordan v. Jackson*, 15 F.3d 333, 346 (4th Cir. 1994) (noting that delay in reunification of a family “implicates the child’s interests in his family’s integrity and in the nurture and companionship of his parents”); *Smith v. City of Fontana*, 818 F.2d 1411, 1418 (9th Cir. 1987), overruled on other grounds by *Hodgers-Durgin v. de la Vina*, 199 F.3d 1037 (9th Cir. 1999) (en banc) (“[The] constitutional interest in familial companionship and society logically extends to protect children from unwarranted state interference with their relationships with their parents.”); *see also* Shanta Trivedi, *My Family Belongs To Me: A Child’s Constitutional Right to Family Integrity*, 56 *Harv. C.R.-C.L. L. Rev.* 267, 277–84 (2021). And the state “spites its own articulated goals” of protecting “the moral, emotional, mental, and physical welfare of the minor” when it separates a child from his fit parent. *Stanley v. Illinois*, 405 U.S. 645, 652–53 (1972).