



Working to end sexual violence in Maryland

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Testimony Supporting Senate Bill 685
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The Maryland Coalition Against Sexual Assault (MCASA) is a non-profit membership organization that includes the State's seventeen rape crisis centers, law enforcement, mental health and health care providers, attorneys, educators, survivors of sexual violence and other concerned individuals. MCASA includes the Sexual Assault Legal Institute (SALI), a statewide legal services provider for survivors of sexual assault. MCASA represents the unified voice and combined energy of all of its members working to eliminate sexual violence. We urge the Ways & Means Committee to report favorably on Senate Bill 685.

Senate Bill 685

Community Notification and Support After Allegations of Sexual Misconduct or Abuse

This bill would require, among other things, development of a model response policy for local school systems to use to respond to credible allegations of sexual abuse and sexual misconduct.

Senate Bill 685 is a response to the very difficult situation which occurred after allegations of sexual misconduct and offenses by a teacher in an Anne Arundel County Elementary School and parents of students at the school were left without the support or information they needed. While one case prompted this legislation, the systemic failures revealed happen repeatedly and this legislation would provide needed structure when horrible things happen to students or investigations occur. As things currently stand, many schools are reluctant to share information about allegations of sexual misconduct or abuse within their institutions. Motivation for this reluctance can range from concerns for student privacy and the integrity of investigations, to a desire to protect against liability and harm to the alleged abuser.

SB685 creates a system that allows the needs of parents and students to be addressed in the aftermath of sexual misconduct and abuse. Abuse thrives on secrecy and creating a system that is transparent helps create a culture that discourages future abuse. Without strong systems in place to share information and resources, gossip and faulty advice can take over. HB685 will help make sure that parents and communities have access to accurate information and will provide referrals to existing resources. It will help provide caretakers with the tools they need to respond to sexual abuse and – most importantly – how to talk with their children.

Stakeholders worked together with the senate sponsor and reached consensus on amendments that were adopted. These will help ensure that schools systems retain appropriate authority as they craft consistent and effective policies to address these issues.

MCASA especially appreciates that information regarding the rape crisis centers certified under Criminal Procedure §11-923 and the child advocacy centers established under §13-2201 Health-General are included in the bill as resources (page 3, lines 24-25 and page 4, lines 15-16). Maryland has worked hard to support these resources and it is important to take steps to ensure communities are reminded of them in times of crisis.

**The Maryland Coalition Against Sexual Assault urges the
Ways & Means Committee to
report favorably on Senate Bill 685**

