

Department of Legislative Services  
Maryland General Assembly  
2017 Session

**FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE**  
**Third Reader - Revised**

Senate Bill 135

(Senator Lee, *et al.*)

Judicial Proceedings

Judiciary

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**Crimes - Child Abuse and Neglect - Failure to Report**

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This bill makes it a misdemeanor for a worker to knowingly fail to provide a required notice or make a required report of suspected child abuse or neglect if the worker (1) has actual knowledge of the abuse or neglect or (2) witnesses the act of the abuse or neglect. A violator is guilty of a misdemeanor and subject to a maximum penalty of up to six months imprisonment and/or a \$1,000 fine. The bill only applies to a failure to report child abuse that occurs during the time the child is a minor.

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**Fiscal Summary**

**State Effect:** The bill is not anticipated to materially impact State incarceration costs. Potential minimal increase in general fund revenues due to the bill's monetary penalty provision.

**Local Effect:** The bill's penalty provisions are not anticipated to materially impact local incarceration costs. Local revenues are not affected.

**Small Business Effect:** None.

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**Analysis**

**Current Law:**

*Mandatory Reporters*

Health care practitioners, police officers, educators, and human service workers who are acting in a professional capacity, and who have reason to believe that a child has been

subjected to abuse or neglect, must notify the local department of social services or the appropriate law enforcement agency. An “educator or human service worker” includes any teacher, counselor, social worker, caseworker, and parole or probation officer. If the worker is acting as a staff member of a hospital, public health agency, child care institution, juvenile detention center, school, or similar institution, then the individual must notify the head of the institution or the designee.

A worker who notifies the appropriate authorities must make an oral report by telephone or direct communication as soon as possible to the local department or the appropriate law enforcement agency if the worker has reason to believe the child has been subjected to abuse or neglect. A written report to the local department is required not later than 48 hours after the contact, examination, or treatment that caused the worker to believe that the child had been subjected to abuse or neglect. A copy of the written report must be provided to the local State’s Attorney. An agency that receives an oral report of suspected abuse or neglect must immediately notify the other agency.

As far as reasonably possible, a worker who makes a report must include the name, age, and home address of the child; the name and home address of the child’s parent or other person responsible for the child’s care; the whereabouts of the child; and the nature and extent of the child abuse or neglect. The report must include any available evidence about previous instances of abuse or neglect, any information that would help to determine the cause of the suspected abuse or neglect, and the identity of any person responsible for the abuse or neglect.

In general, a person other than a health care practitioner, police officer, educator, or human service worker who has reason to believe that a child has been subjected to abuse or neglect must notify the local department of social services or the appropriate law enforcement agency. Attorneys and clergy are generally exempt from reporting if they become aware of suspected abuse or neglect through privileged communications, as specified in statute.

Individuals who in good faith make or participate in making a report of abuse or neglect or participate in an investigation or resulting judicial proceeding are immune from civil liability or criminal penalties.

### *Penalties for Failure to Report*

State law does not criminalize the failure of a worker to report suspected abuse or neglect. The licensing boards for some workers who are mandated to report child abuse and neglect (nurses, doctors, and social workers are examples) are authorized to discipline workers for failing to report. Pursuant to Chapters 374 and 375 of 2016, if an agency is participating in a child abuse or neglect investigation and has substantial grounds to believe that a worker has knowingly failed to make a required report of suspected abuse or neglect, it must file a

complaint with the worker's licensing board, law enforcement agency, county board of education, or other agency, institution, or licensed facility, as appropriate, at which the worker is employed.

### *Child Abuse and Neglect Investigations*

After receiving a report of suspected abuse or neglect of a child who lives in Maryland that is alleged to have occurred in the State, the local department of social services and/or the appropriate law enforcement agency must promptly investigate the report to protect the health, safety, and welfare of the child or children. Within 24 hours after receiving a report of suspected physical or sexual child abuse, and within five days after receiving a report of suspected child neglect or mental injury, the local department or law enforcement agency must (1) see the child; (2) attempt to have an on-site interview with the child's caretaker; (3) decide on the safety of the child and of other children in the household; and (4) decide on the safety of the other children in the care or custody of the alleged abuser. The determinations and assessments that are required during an abuse or neglect investigation are specified in statute.

The local State's Attorney must assist in a child abuse or neglect investigation if requested to do so by a local department of social services. The local departments, appropriate law enforcement agencies, the State's Attorneys in the counties and Baltimore City, and the local health officers must enter into a written agreement pertaining to standard operating procedures for investigations of suspected abuse or neglect. A joint investigation procedure must be implemented for conducting investigations of sexual abuse, which must include techniques for expediting validation of sexual abuse complaints and other techniques to decrease trauma to the child.

To the extent possible, a child abuse or neglect investigation must be completed within 10 days after receiving the notice of the suspected abuse or neglect. Within 10 days after receiving the first notice of suspected abuse or neglect of a child, the local department of social services or law enforcement agency must report the preliminary investigation findings to the local State's Attorney. Within 5 business days after the investigation is completed, the local department and the law enforcement agency, if the law enforcement agency participated in the investigation, must make a complete written report of findings to the local State's Attorney.

### **Background:**

#### *Mandatory Reporters*

According to the Child Welfare Information Gateway, every state and the District of Columbia have laws that identify those people who are required to report

suspected incidences of child abuse and neglect. As of August 2015 (the latest information available), 48 states and the District of Columbia specify professions for which the mandatory reporting requirements apply. Typically, mandated reporters include school personnel, social workers, health care workers, child care providers, medical examiners or coroners, and law enforcement officers. The other two states, New Jersey and Wyoming, do not specify professional workers who are required to report but require all persons to report suspected child abuse or neglect. At least 18 states, including Maryland, require all citizens to report suspected abuse or neglect regardless of profession. In Maryland, however, the reporting requirements for a citizen are less stringent than the reporting requirements for covered professionals.

### *Failure to Report Penalties*

According to the Child Welfare Information Gateway, as of August 2015, 48 states and the District of Columbia impose penalties on mandatory reporters who knowingly or willfully fail to report suspected child abuse or neglect. The only other state that does not impose a penalty, in addition to Maryland, is Wyoming.

In 40 of the 48 states that impose penalties, the penalty is a misdemeanor. In Arizona and Minnesota, misdemeanors are upgraded to felonies for failure to report more serious situations, while in Connecticut, Illinois, and Kentucky, second or subsequent violations are classified as felonies.

A mandated reporter who fails to report can face jail terms ranging from 30 days to five years and/or fines ranging from \$300 to \$10,000. In California and Massachusetts, harsher penalties are imposed when the failure to report results in the child's death or serious bodily injury. Louisiana imposes harsher penalties when the reporter fails to report sexual abuse or serious bodily injury. Delaware and Virginia impose harsher penalties upon second or subsequent convictions for failure to report. Vermont imposes its fine for failure to report when the reporter willfully failed to report with the intent to conceal the abuse. West Virginia imposes harsher penalties for the failure to report the sexual assault of a child.

**State Revenues:** General fund revenues may increase minimally as a result of the bill's monetary penalty provision from cases heard in the District Court.

**State Expenditures:** Generally, persons serving a sentence of one year or less in a jurisdiction other than Baltimore City are sentenced to a local detention facility. The Baltimore Pretrial Complex, a State-operated facility, is used primarily for pretrial detentions. The bill is not anticipated to materially impact State incarceration costs.

**Local Expenditures:** Counties pay the full cost of incarceration for people in their facilities for the first 12 months of the sentence. Per diem operating costs of local detention

facilities have ranged from approximately \$60 to \$160 per inmate in recent years. The bill is not anticipated to materially impact local incarceration costs.

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### **Additional Information**

**Prior Introductions:** SB 571 of 2015, a similar bill, received an unfavorable report from the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee. Its cross file, HB 856, was referred to the House Judiciary Committee but was subsequently withdrawn. SB 210 of 2014, a similar bill, received an unfavorable report from the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee. Its cross file, HB 1053, received an unfavorable report from the House Judiciary Committee. Numerous similar or identical bills were introduced in 2013 and 2012.

**Cross File:** None.

**Information Source(s):** Maryland State Commission on Criminal Sentencing Policy; Judiciary (Administrative Office of the Courts); Office of the Public Defender; State's Attorney's Association; Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services; Department of State Police; Child Welfare Information Gateway; Department of Legislative Services

**Fiscal Note History:** First Reader - January 30, 2017  
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Analysis by: Jennifer K. Botts

Direct Inquiries to:  
(410) 946-5510  
(301) 970-5510