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**Working to end sexual violence in Maryland**

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**Testimony Supporting Senate Bill 594 with Amendments**  
**Lisae C. Jordan, Executive Director & Counsel**  
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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) which provides direct legal services for survivors across Maryland. We urge the Judicial Proceedings Committee to report favorably on Senate Bill 594 with Amendments.

**Senate Bill 594 – Custody and Visitation – Protection for Abused and Neglected Children**

This bill helps enforce and illuminate court decisions in custody and visitation proceedings after a finding of abuse or neglect of the child. Current law requires that courts evaluate the likelihood of whether abuse or neglect will reoccur and that unsupervised contact between the child and abusive or neglectful parent be denied unless there is no likelihood of further abuse or neglect. Supervised visitation is permitted with specified protections.

Unfortunately, these provisions are not always adhered to and, when they are, it can be difficult to determine the court's reasoning. This frustrates the purpose of the law and hampers appropriate appeals. SB594 would require courts to state the reasons for any finding that there is no likelihood of further abuse or neglect. MCASA believes this is a small but important improvement to some of the most difficult and contentious family law cases, including those involving child sexual abuse.

A second provision in SB594 would clarify that any supervisor of visitation be "neutral and physically present". We appreciate the desire for objective supervisors. The parents of abusers or other family members are too often chosen as supervisors and lack appreciation for the seriousness of sexual abuse, particularly when it involves boundary violations or grooming short of penetration. However, a blanket ban on supervisors who are connected to the family is impractical and could have unintended consequences. It is also unclear how the requirement of being physically present would be implemented (for example, would this permit or prohibit supervisors from leaving the room to use a restroom?). MCASA respectfully suggests that this language in the bill be replaced with a requirement that the court include any necessary details of supervision in its order.

**The Maryland Coalition Against Sexual Assault urges the  
Judicial Proceedings Committee to  
report favorably on Senate Bill 594 with Amendments**