

DATE: February 13, 2020

BILL NUMBER: HB 670 **COMMITTEE:** Judiciary

BILL TITLE: Family Law - Investigation of Suspected Child Abuse and Neglect - Preliminary Report to State's Attorney

DHS POSITION: Support

Good afternoon Chairman Clippinger, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee.

I am Michelle L. Farr, Executive Director of Social Services Administration, within the Maryland Department of Human Services. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 670.

Current law requires the Local Departments of Social Services (LDSS) to report any preliminary findings of child abuse or neglect to the State's Attorney's Office within 10 days of opening a child abuse or neglect investigation. HB 670 would remove this reporting requirement. The LDSS has made tremendous efforts to refine their practice model, in a way that serves the child holistically. This model includes a multidisciplinary team that includes the State's Attorney. As such, we believe this reporting requirement has become obsolete, in the light of the improved coordination between the LDSS, and the prosecutor's office within our Child Advocacy Centers.

The Child Advocacy Center (CAC) model is comprised of a multidisciplinary team that includes law enforcement, legal services, child protective services, victim's advocates, and medical and mental health services. Access to a comprehensive offering of services within one child-friendly facility is critical to the child's health and well-being. Without a multidisciplinary team to coordinate care for the child victim, the child may end up having to share very painful details about their abuse repeatedly to doctors, cops, lawyers, therapists, investigators, judges, and others. The CAC model minimizes traumatization by having one streamlined intake process that is followed up with wrap around services.

With this practice model, the Office of the State's Attorney is involved in a child abuse and neglect investigation at the outset of the case. There is no need to issue a separate report of preliminary findings, because the LDSS and prosecutor work together to conduct a joint investigation. This reporting requirement does not serve any meaningful purpose, does not complement practice, and creates an unnecessary procedural step for the LDSS.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of HB 670. We appreciate your support as we continue to improve the delivery of our services, and streamline our processes. I ask the committee to give HB 670 a favorable report.