

THE COALITION TO PROTECT MARYLAND'S CHILDREN

Our Mission: To combine and amplify the power of organizations and citizens working together to keep children safe from abuse and neglect. We strive to secure the budgetary and public policy resources to make meaningful and measurable improvements in safety, permanence, and well-being.

Testimony before the House Judiciary Committee
House Bill #1320 : Child Against Child Sexual Offenses

March 10, 2022

The Coalition to Protect Maryland's Children (CPMC) is a consortium of Maryland organizations and individuals formed in 1996 to promote meaningful child welfare reform. CPMC **OPPOSES** passage of House Bill #1320 – Child Against Child Sexual Offenses.

This bill would impose criminal sanctions against a parent or guardian who knows or should have known that their child offended against another child and failed to adequately supervise the offending child. While the intent of the bill may be to protect children, we do not believe that the threat of criminal justice system involvement will change parental judgement or behavior.

There are many reasons why children may sexually offend against other children, including violence between parents or caregivers, incarceration or death of family members, physical or sexual abuse, or neglect, including inappropriate exposure to sexually explicit material. The best way to ensure that sexual offenses do not recur is to provide the offending child with effective treatment from an experienced mental health professional. Children should be able to return to normal childhood or teenage activities based on their response to treatment. As children grow older and become more independent, particularly during the teenage years, the expectation of constant supervision required by this bill is simply unrealistic.

Parents and guardians who are negligent in supervising their children are already at risk for civil litigation. The addition of criminal penalties is unlikely to further change parental behavior. The best way to prevent children who commit sexual offenses from reoffending is to provide effective treatment. The funds required to support prosecution of parents would be much better spent on treatment and primary prevention of sexual abuse.

For these reasons we urge an *unfavorable* committee report on **House Bill 1320 – Child Against Child Sexual Offenses**.