



*Advocates for Children and Youth is a statewide non-profit focused on improving the lives and experiences of Maryland's children through policy change and program improvement. We champion solutions to child welfare, education, health, and juvenile justice issues, positioning us to influence the full spectrum of youth experiences. This multi-issue platform helps us to improve the entirety of children's worlds—the systems they touch, the people they interact with, and the environment where they live.*

**Testimony before the Ways and Means Committee  
In SUPPORT of**

**House Bill 72- Education - Sexual Abuse and Assault Awareness and Prevention  
Program- Development and Implementation**

**Melissa Rock, Child Welfare Director, Advocates for Children and Youth  
February 4, 2016**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill 72- Education - Sexual Abuse and Assault Awareness and Prevention Program - Development and Implementation. Advocates for Children and Youth (ACY) supports this bill.

In Maryland, over the last year, there were 959 cases where the Local Department of Social Services (LDSS) found that a child under 18 was sexually abused.<sup>1</sup> Although that is a very high number, it is only a fraction of the number of youth in Maryland who actually were sexually abused. First, those are only sexual abuse situations where the LDSS had to get involved because the child's caretaker was involved in the abuse. Second, most sexual assault is never reported to the police or the LDSS. According to the Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (RAINN), citing statistics from the Department of Justice, 68% of sexual abuse is unreported.<sup>2</sup>

The national data for how often children are sexually assaulted is also staggering. According to RAINN:<sup>3</sup>

- 15% of sexual assault and rape victims are under age 12
- 29% of sexual assault and rape victims are age 12-17
- 44% are under age 18
- 12-34 are the highest risk years
- Girls ages 16-19 are 4 times more likely than the general population to be victims of rape, attempted rape, or sexual assault
- 7% of girls in grades 5-8 and 12% of girls in grades 9-12 said they had been sexually abused.

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<sup>1</sup> Department of Human Resources. Data and Reports. Monthly Child Welfare Data, November 2015. <http://www.dhr.state.md.us/documents/Data%20and%20Reports/SSA/Monthly%20Child%20Welfare%20Data/SFY%202016/2015-11-November-Child-Welfare-Data.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://rainn.org/get-information/statistics/reporting-rates> (internal citations omitted)

<sup>3</sup> <https://rainn.org/get-information/statistics/sexual-assault-victims> (internal citations omitted)

- 3% of boys grades 5-8 and 5% of boys in grades 9-12 said they had been sexually abused.

HB 72 requires that age-appropriate education on the awareness and prevention of sexual abuse and assault be developed and implemented in private and public schools. Education for young people is a key way to decrease the number of youth who become victims of sexual assault and abuse. **Advocates for Children and Youth urges that evidence-based programs be used, and urges this committee to issue a favorable report on HB 72 to help prevent sexual abuse and assault against Maryland's children.**