



*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 Judiciary Committee**

### **In SUPPORT of House Bill 359- Child Neglect—Reporting—Commission of Crime of Violence in Presence of Minor**

**Melissa Rock, Child Welfare Director, Advocates for Children and Youth  
February 9, 2017**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill 359- Child Neglect—Reporting— Commission of Crime of Violence in Presence of Minor. Advocates for Children and Youth (ACY) supports this bill.

HB 359 expands the definition of neglect in the Child in Need of Assistance statute to include exposing a child to a crime of violence,<sup>1</sup> where the violent actor knew or should have known the child was present. According to Child Trends' May 2016 report on children's exposure to violence, nationally, in 2014, more than 2/3 of children under 18 were exposed to violence (either as a victim or a witness to the violence).<sup>2</sup> In fact, the report further indicates that:

**Children are more likely to be exposed to violence and crime than adults are.**

An experience of violence can lead to lasting physical, mental, and emotional harm, whether the child is a direct victim or a witness. Children who are exposed to violence are more likely to suffer from attachment problems, regressive behavior, anxiety, and depression, and to have aggression and conduct problems.<sup>3</sup> (Emphasis added. Internal citations omitted.)

By expanding the neglect definition as required by HB 359, we will be better able to treat the trauma suffered by children exposed to violence. Early intervention is crucial if we want to break the cycle of violence that often occurs within children and youth who are exposed to violence.

**We urge this Committee to issue a favorable report on HB 359 to ensure that children exposed to violence get the services and supports they need by including them in the definition of neglect.**

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<sup>1</sup> HB 359 references the crimes of violence listed in § 5-101 of the Public Safety Article which includes abduction; arson in the first degree; assault in the first or second degree; burglary in the first, second, or third degree; carjacking and armed carjacking; escape in the first degree; kidnapping; voluntary manslaughter; maiming as previously proscribed under former Article 27, § 386 of the Code; mayhem as previously proscribed under former Article 27, § 384 of the Code; murder in the first or second degree; rape in the first or second degree; robbery; robbery with a dangerous weapon; sexual offense in the first, second, or third degree; home invasion under § 6-202(b) of the Criminal Law Article; an attempt to commit any of the aforementioned crimes; or assault with intent to commit any of the aforementioned crimes.

<sup>2</sup> Child Trends Data Bank, "Children's Exposure to Violence: Indicators on Children and Youth," (May 2016) p. 2. Report can be accessed here: [http://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/118\\_Exposure\\_to\\_Violence.pdf](http://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/118_Exposure_to_Violence.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Id.

