



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 Judicial Proceedings Committee

In SUPPORT of Senate Bill 996- Family Law—Child Abuse and Neglect—Definitions

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Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill 1263- Family Law—Child Abuse and Neglect—Definitions. Advocates for Children and Youth (ACY) supports this bill.

SB 996 makes two important changes to Maryland's child abuse and neglect definitions. First, it adds "a person who, because of the person's position or occupation, exercises authority over the child" to the individuals covered by the physical and sexual abuse definitions. This will ensure that children can receive the services anytime an adult who has authority over them abuses them. Currently, if there is a coach and an assistant coach, the assistant coach might not be covered by our definitions, and SB 996 closes that loophole.

SB 996 also clarifies that when a child suffers a mental injury, he or she is protected by the child abuse and neglect definitions even if there was no intent to harm that child. This is important because often mental injury occurs when a parent has serious mental health issues, and might not be intending to cause mental injury to their child, but nonetheless, that child is suffering, and needs the protections a Child in Need of Assistance can provide. Mental injury cases are very rare in Maryland. In State Fiscal Year 2016, there were **9,739** neglect cases (for 20,558 children) all across Maryland.¹ During that same period, there were only **20** findings that mental injury had occurred (7 were indicated findings² (which is **0.14% of all indicated findings**)) and 13 were unsubstantiated findings (or **0.34% of all substantiated findings**)).³ While the mental injury cases are rare, it is essential that children who suffer mental injuries are protected even if their caretakers did not intend to harm them.

We urge this Committee to issue a favorable report on SB 996 to ensure that children who need the protections from our child welfare system can receive them.

¹ University of Maryland School of Social Work, Ruth Young Center for Families & Children, "Child Welfare Performance Indicators Report, Maryland Department of Human Resources Social Services Administration," (December 2016), p. 5.

²<http://dhr.maryland.gov/documents/Data%20and%20Reports/SSA/Monthly%20Child%20Welfare%20Data/SFY%202016/2016-06-Child-Welfare-Data.pdf> at p.14.

³ Id. at p. 15

