



House Bill 697

Child Abuse and Neglect – Statewide Reporting – 2-1-1 Maryland

MACo Position: **OPPOSE**

To: Health and Government Operations Committee

Date: February 23, 2017

From: Natasha Mehu

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) OPPOSES HB 697 as it would shift the critical responsibility of answering calls concerning child abuse and neglect from local departments of social services to the statewide 2-1-1 system. While the concept of a statewide hotline is well intentioned, it has practical shortcomings.

The child welfare system in Maryland is primarily managed locally by each Local Department of Social Services (LDSS). Screening of child abuse and neglect calls is one of their core functions. Each county has highly trained and specialized staff that respond to those calls. The localized system allows them to efficiently and effectively gather necessary information, assess the situation, and dispatch local resources. In cases of child abuse and neglect, every minute counts and LDSS are best trained and situated to respond to urgent concerns.

2-1-1 Maryland functions as a referral service to help direct callers to local services that may be able to help them. It was not designed to perform critical screening functions and response functions for child abuse and neglect calls. 2-1-1 staff can be trained to refer callers to the appropriate local agencies. However, this may have an unintended consequence of hurting rather than helping callers. Directing individuals to call 2-1-1 instead of reaching out to the LDSS directly would add an unnecessary step and delay the caller from getting timely assistance.

Responding to reports of child abuse or neglect is a sensitive and high stakes responsibility that should remain with the LDSS that have the training and experience to appropriately handle these calls. For these reasons, MACo urges an **UNFAVORABLE** report on HB 697.