

# HOUSE BILL 670

D4

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By: **Chair, Judiciary Committee (By Request – Departmental – Human Services)**

Introduced and read first time: January 29, 2020

Assigned to: Judiciary

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Committee Report: Favorable with amendments

House action: Adopted

Read second time: March 8, 2020

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## CHAPTER \_\_\_\_\_

1 AN ACT concerning

2 **Family Law – Investigation of Suspected Child Abuse and Neglect – Preliminary**  
3 **Report to State’s Attorney**

4 FOR the purpose of repealing the requirement that a local department of social services or  
5 law enforcement agency provide a local State’s Attorney with a certain report of the  
6 preliminary findings of an investigation of suspected child abuse ~~or neglect~~ within a  
7 certain period of time; and generally relating to the investigation and reporting of  
8 suspected child abuse and neglect.

9 BY repealing

10 Article – Family Law  
11 Section 5–706(i)  
12 Annotated Code of Maryland  
13 (2019 Replacement Volume)

14 BY repealing and reenacting, with amendments,

15 Article – Family Law  
16 Section 5–706(j) through (t)  
17 Annotated Code of Maryland  
18 (2019 Replacement Volume)

19 SECTION 1. BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF MARYLAND,  
20 That the Laws of Maryland read as follows:

21 **Article – Family Law**

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EXPLANATION: CAPITALS INDICATE MATTER ADDED TO EXISTING LAW.

[Brackets] indicate matter deleted from existing law.

Underlining indicates amendments to bill.

~~Strike out~~ indicates matter stricken from the bill by amendment or deleted from the law by amendment.



1 5-706.

2 [(i) Within 10 days after the local department or law enforcement agency receives  
3 the first notice of suspected abuse of a child who lives in this State that is alleged to have  
4 occurred in this State, the local department or law enforcement agency shall report to the  
5 local State's Attorney the preliminary findings of the investigation.]

6 [(j)] (I) Within 5 business days after completion of the investigation of  
7 suspected abuse of a child who lives in this State that is alleged to have occurred in this  
8 State, the local department and the appropriate law enforcement agency, if that agency  
9 participated in the investigation, shall make a complete written report of its findings to the  
10 local State's Attorney.

11 [(k)] (J) Promptly after receiving a report of suspected abuse or neglect of a child  
12 who lives in this State that is alleged to have occurred outside of this State, the local  
13 department shall:

14 (1) forward the report to the appropriate agency outside of this State that  
15 is authorized to receive and investigate reports of suspected abuse or neglect;

16 (2) cooperate to the extent requested with the out-of-state agency  
17 investigating the report; and

18 (3) if determined appropriate by the local department:

19 (i) interview the child to assess whether the child is safe; and

20 (ii) provide services to the child and the child's family.

21 [(l)] (K) Notwithstanding the provisions of this section, the Secretary may  
22 implement an alternative response program for selected reports of abuse or neglect.

23 [(m)] (L) (1) The Department shall convene a multidisciplinary alternative  
24 response advisory council.

25 (2) The advisory council shall consist of the following members:

26 (i) the Secretary of Human Services, or the Secretary's designee;

27 (ii) the Secretary of Health, or the Secretary's designee;

28 (iii) the State Superintendent of Schools, or the Superintendent's  
29 designee;

30 (iv) a representative from the Maryland Disability Law Center;

- 1 (v) a representative from a child advocacy organization;
- 2 (vi) a representative from a community partner or a local service  
3 provider;
- 4 (vii) a pediatrician with experience in diagnosing and treating  
5 injuries related to abuse and neglect;
- 6 (viii) an attorney with experience representing children or adults in  
7 abuse and neglect cases;
- 8 (ix) a representative from the Office of the Public Defender;
- 9 (x) a parent or guardian who has personal experience with the child  
10 protective services system;
- 11 (xi) a child who has personal experience with the child protective  
12 services system;
- 13 (xii) two representatives from local departments of social services;  
14 and
- 15 (xiii) two representatives from local citizens review panels.
- 16 (3) The Secretary of Human Services or the Secretary's designee shall be  
17 the chair of the advisory council.
- 18 (4) The advisory council shall advise the Department on:
- 19 (i) the development of the alternative response implementation  
20 plan, which may include a pilot program;
- 21 (ii) oversight and monitoring of the alternative response  
22 implementation plan;
- 23 (iii) consulting with local citizens review panels, local services  
24 affiliates, and other local partners for feedback and recommendations on the alternative  
25 response implementation plan;
- 26 (iv) defining the scope of the independent evaluation of the  
27 implementation of the alternative response program; and
- 28 (v) defining the scope of the ongoing evaluation of the alternative  
29 response program.

1           **[(n)] (M)**     Only a low risk report of abuse or neglect may be considered for an  
2 alternative response.

3           **[(o)] (N)**     A report that is not assigned for an alternative response shall be  
4 assigned for investigation in accordance with this section.

5           **[(p)] (O)**     The following reports of suspected abuse or neglect may not be assigned  
6 for an alternative response:

7                   (1)     sexual abuse; and

8                   (2)     abuse or neglect:

9                           (i)     occurring in an out-of-home placement;

10                          (ii)    resulting in death or serious physical or mental injury;

11                          (iii)  if, in the previous 3 years, the individual suspected of abuse or  
12 neglect has been identified as responsible for abuse or neglect as documented in the records  
13 of the local department; or

14                          (iv)  if the individual suspected of abuse or neglect has had one report  
15 assigned for an alternative response within the past 12 months or two reports assigned for  
16 an alternative response within the past 24 months.

17           **[(q)] (P)**     A report assigned for an alternative response may be reassigned at any  
18 time for an immediate investigation based on any of the following factors and  
19 circumstances:

20                   (1)     a reassessment of the report or relevant facts;

21                   (2)     a determination that the case satisfies a criterion in subsection **[(p)] (O)**  
22 of this section; or

23                   (3)     a family's inability or refusal to participate in the alternative response  
24 assessment.

25           **[(r)] (Q)**     A report assigned for an investigation may be reassigned for an  
26 alternative response at any time based on:

27                   (1)     a reassessment of the report or relevant facts that demonstrate that the  
28 case meets the criteria for an alternative response;

29                   (2)     a determination that accepted services would address all issues of risk  
30 of abuse or neglect and child safety; and

1 (3) approval by a caseworker supervisor.

2 [(s)] (R) When a report is referred for an alternative response, the local  
3 department shall:

4 (1) see the child and the child's parent or primary caretaker within 24  
5 hours of receiving a report of physical abuse;

6 (2) see the child and the child's parent or primary caretaker within 5 days  
7 of receiving a report of neglect;

8 (3) attempt to have an on-site interview with the child's parent or primary  
9 caretaker;

10 (4) evaluate the child's home environment;

11 (5) decide on the safety of the child, wherever the child is, and of other  
12 children in the household;

13 (6) decide on the safety of other children in the care or custody of the  
14 individual suspected of abuse or neglect;

15 (7) advise the appropriate law enforcement agency that the report has been  
16 assigned for an alternative response, if the law enforcement agency made the report of  
17 abuse or neglect;

18 (8) inform the individual suspected of child abuse or neglect of the  
19 allegations made against the individual in a manner consistent with laws protecting the  
20 rights of the person who made the report;

21 (9) complete an alternative response assessment within 60 days after the  
22 receipt of the report;

23 (10) within 10 days after completing the alternative response assessment,  
24 provide a written report to the family members who are participating in the alternative  
25 response assessment as to whether and what services are necessary to address:

26 (i) the safety of the child or other children in the household; and

27 (ii) the risk of subsequent abuse or neglect; and

28 (11) consistent with the assessment and any safety or services plans:

29 (i) render any appropriate services in the best interests of the child;

30 (ii) refer the family or child for additional services; or

1 (iii) as necessary for the safety of the child or other children in the  
2 household, establish a plan to monitor the safety plan and the provision or completion of  
3 appropriate services.

4 [(t)] (S) The local department:

5 (1) shall:

6 (i) maintain complete records related to an alternative response and  
7 services for 3 years after the report was received if there is no subsequent child welfare  
8 involvement; and

9 (ii) expunge complete records related to an alternative response and  
10 services if there is no subsequent child welfare involvement after 3 years;

11 (2) may not use or disclose records related to an alternative response for  
12 purposes of responding to a request for background information for employment or  
13 voluntary services; and

14 (3) shall protect from disclosure records related to an alternative response  
15 in accordance with § 1–202 of the Human Services Article.

16 SECTION 2. AND BE IT FURTHER ENACTED, That this Act shall take effect  
17 October 1, 2020.

Approved:

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Governor.

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Speaker of the House of Delegates.

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President of the Senate.