



HB1558 - Residential Treatment Centers and Facilities – Sexual Abuse and Harassment – Reporting and Prevention

Presented to the Hon. Luke Clippinger and Members of the House Judiciary Committee
March 10, 2020 1:00 p.m.

POSITION: SUPPORT

NARAL Pro-Choice Maryland urges the House Judiciary Committee **a favorable report on HB1558 Residential Treatment Centers and Facilities – Sexual Abuse and Harassment – Reporting and Prevention**, sponsored by Delegate Geraldine Valentino-Smith.

Our organization is an advocate for reproductive health, rights, and justice. Thus, we strive to ensure that every individual can maintain their personal bodily autonomy and grow up in a safe and healthy environment. Children who have survived sexual abuse and harassment—a clear violation of their bodily autonomy and safety—unequivocally require appropriate supportive services. This is especially true for the children who are emotionally disturbed and residing in residential treatment centers. Therefore, in order to ensure the safety and wellbeing of vulnerable children, we advocate for policies that would expand the reporting and prevention of sexual abuse or harassment.

HB1558 applies laws regarding the reporting and prevention of abuse and harassment in Maryland state facilities to include forensic residential centers and residential treatment centers for emotionally disturbed children and teens. The Maryland Coalition Against Sexual Assault estimates that there are more than 31 thousand cases of child sexual assault each year in Maryland.¹ Often, these cases go unreported and the children affected are unable to receive the support they need. This is especially true in residential treatment centers, which provide intensive mental health services to youth who are committed. In 2016, two state agencies placed a moratorium on sending children and teens in state custody to a Baltimore County residential treatment center for “not providing proper supervision after one patient reported being sexually assaulted.”² Despite the fact that the facility was contracting with the Maryland state government, regulators determined that it did not enforce policies and procedures designed to protect residents “at risk for the alleged assaults.”³ Considering how residential treatment facilities such as this one often houses young people suffering from severe emotional and behavioral problems, it is incredibly important to implement policies protecting such vulnerable youth from sexual abuse and harassment.

When an incident of sexual abuse or harassment occurs, residential treatment facilities involved with the State of Maryland must report such incidents to ensure that the directly-impacted youth are protected, listened to, and supported. These providers are responsible for caring for these vulnerable children and teens. Therefore, NARAL Pro-Choice Maryland urges **a favorable committee report on HB1558**. Thank you for your time and consideration.

¹ “Child Victims of Sexual Assault: Focus on Maryland,” Maryland Coalition Against Sexual Assault, 2012. <https://mcasa.org/assets/files/Children-in-Maryland-AC-Updated.pdf>.

² Green, Erica L., “Maryland state agencies stop sending youths for treatment to Good Shepherd, group home,” *The Baltimore Sun*, <https://www.baltimoresun.com/news/investigations/bs-md-juvenile-girls-moratorium-20161216-story.html>.

³ Ibid.