



Maryland
Department of
Human Services

Advocacy Within the Context of the Legislative Process

MASSB Conference - October 16, 2025

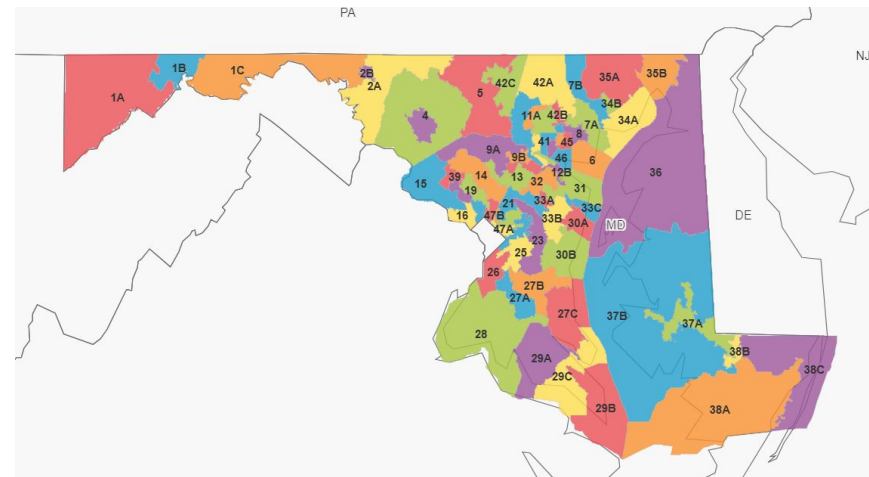
Melissa Bender, Senior Advisor, DHS Office of Government Affairs

Agenda

- Overview of the Maryland General Assembly and the state legislative process
- Advocacy Opportunities
 - What are DHS' 2026 legislative priorities?
 - How to engage your state representatives
 - How to submit written/verbal testimony
 - Advocacy Timing
- Tools and Resources
- Q&A

Maryland General Assembly

- Maryland Senate and House of Delegates
- 47 multi-member districts
- Each chamber is organized by committee:
 - *DHS Funding, Family Investment Administration:*
House Appropriations;
Senate Budget & Tax
 - *Social Services; Child Support:* House Judiciary;
Senate Judicial Proceedings;
Senate Finance



The Legislative Session

- 90 days, runs from early January - early April
- [Session Calendar](#)
- Jan. - Feb. ideal time for member meetings
- What is the “crossover deadline” and why does it matter?

Department of Legislative Services
General Assembly of Maryland
Dates of Interest
2026 SESSION
448th Session

JANUARY						
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				H		
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
H						
25	26	27	28	29	30	31

FEBRUARY						
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8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
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22	23	24	25	26	27	28

MARCH						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

APRIL						
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18

January 14 **GENERAL ASSEMBLY CONVENES** (*noon, Wednesday*)
21 Final date for Governor to introduce budget bill
21 Final date for the Governor to introduce the capital budget bill
23 **10th Day – SENATE AND HOUSE BILL REQUEST GUARANTEE DATE**
26 **13th Day** – Administration bills introduced in the Senate after this date referred to Senate Rules Committee
28 **15th Day** – Final date for introduction of Governor’s Salary Commission, General Assembly Compensation Commission, and Judicial Compensation Commission recommendations. Legislative action must be taken within 50 days after introduction of the joint resolutions of the Governor’s Salary Commission and the Judicial Compensation Commission.

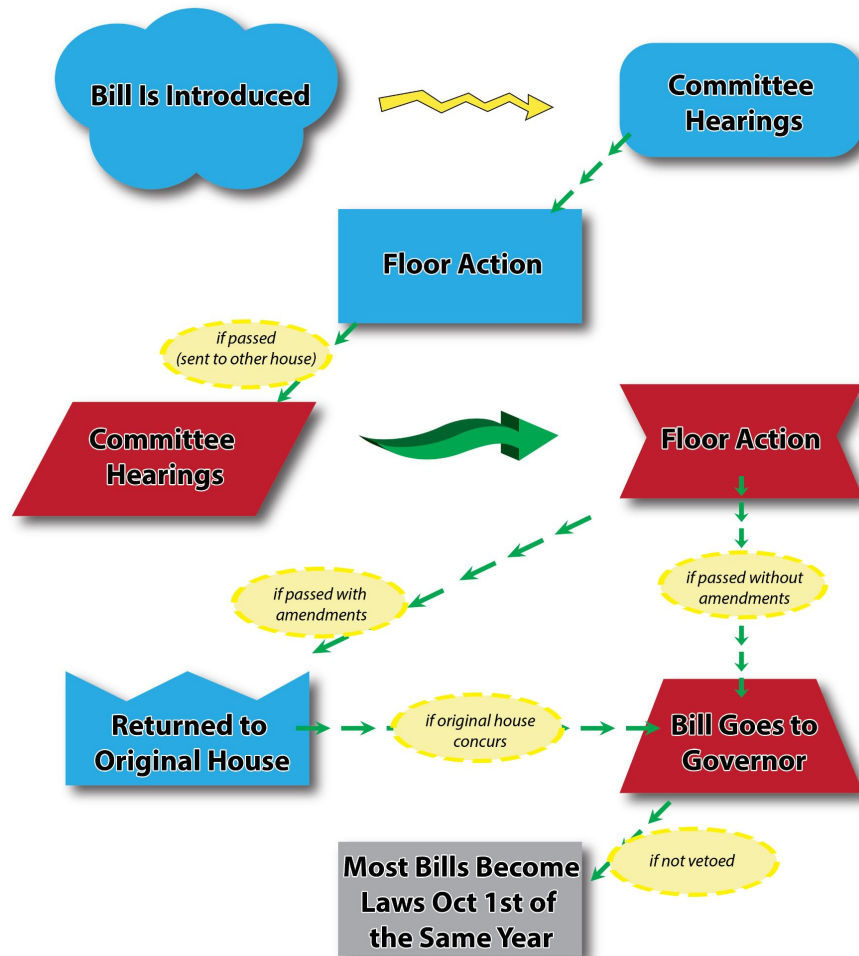
TBA Governor delivers the State of the State Address (noon)

February 9 **27th Day – SENATE BILL INTRODUCTION DATE**
Senate bills introduced after this date referred to the Senate Rules Committee
Deadline for members to send LBI requests to DLS to guarantee preparation by 55th day.
12 Day before House Bill Introduction Date; “Hopper” will close at 5:00 P.M.
13 **31st Day – HOUSE BILL INTRODUCTION DATE**
House bills introduced after this date referred to the House Rules and Executive Nominations Committee
Deadline for members to send LBI requests to DLS to guarantee preparation by the 55th day.
22 **40th Day** – “Green Bag” appointments submitted by Governor (*Delivered on Friday, February 20*)

March 9 **55th Day** – Final date for introduction of bills and LBIs without suspension of Rules
17 **63rd Day** – Committee Reporting Courtesy Date
Each Chamber’s committees to report their own bills by this date
23 **69th Day** – Opposite Chamber Bill Crossover Date
Each Chamber to send to other Chamber those bills it intends to pass favorably.
Opposite Chamber bills received after this date subject to referral to Rules Committees (Senate Rule 32(c), House Courtesy Date)

April 6 **83rd Day** – Budget bill to be passed by both Chambers
13 **90th Day – ADJOURNMENT “SINE DIE”** (*Monday*)

How a Bill Becomes a Law in Maryland



Advocacy Opportunities

What are DHS' 2026 legislative priorities?

Who to engage?

When is the best time to engage?

DHS Legislative Priorities

Re-entry and reintegration support

Adult Protective Services Alignment

No bill
numbers
available yet!

**PreK Report Deadline (Admin package)

**DHS Boards/Commissions Modernization
(Admin package)

**Heat and Eat - via budget process (BRFA)

Other bills on our radar

“Know Before They Knock” Parent Bill of Rights
(HB223 - 2025)

Last year, DHS submitted INFO testimony and took steps to address sponsor concerns.

Bill number and bill text will change this year, FYI.
Amendments under discussion during the interim.

How to identify your state representatives:

Maryland Manual Online lists [state legislators by county](#).

You can also look up your own legislators by entering your mailing address [here](#).

If you have a large county delegation, prioritize members on relevant committees.

Keep the county legislative roster on file for January!

Contacting Legislators

1. Individually connecting with members and their staff
2. Organizing a lobby day to reach as many members from your county on the same day

Both virtual and in-person engagement options.

Sample Meeting Invite

Hi Sen./Del. Name,

I am reaching out from the ABC County Board of Social Services. Our board members would like the opportunity to discuss our legislative priorities as we work together to best serve ABC County residents. When would you be available to connect, either in Annapolis or virtually?

Sincerely,

Name

Mailing address or ZIP code

ABC County Board of Social Services

Legislative staff
will look for:

- organizational affiliation
- are you a constituent?
- purpose/agenda of meeting

Member Meeting Tips

- Typical meeting duration is 15 to 30 minutes
- Be concise and allow room for two-way dialogue
- Relationship building with the legislator
- Optional 1 pager outlining MASSB role and relationship to DHS, priority bills numbers, description, position
- Sample meeting agenda:
 - Introductions
 - Review board's legislative priorities
 - Ask the members what their related priorities are and how to stay engaged with their office
 - Thank yous + capture any follow up
- Members and staff may have questions. Okay to not have all the answers but promise to follow up.

Lobby Day Tips

- Monday evenings are a popular in-person time (6-8PM)
- 15 minute meeting blocks with walking/travel time
- If you live in a more populous jurisdiction, delegation members may be willing to meet jointly, allowing you to cover more ground.
- Cluster meetings in the same chamber together for smoother logistics
- Comfortable shoes

Sample Schedule

6:00 - 6:15PM - Senator A

6:30 - 6:45PM - Delegate B

7:00 - 7:15PM - Delegates
C+D (joint)

How to Testify

Organizations can share their perspective on proposed legislation through either verbal or written testimony. Can offer verbal testimony virtually over zoom.

Historically, Social Services Boards have only offered testimony when requested by LDSS and in alignment with appointing County Executive/county government.

To sign up to testify, you'll need to create a [MyMGA account](#) on the MGA website.

Positions include:

- Favorable,
- Favorable with Amendments
- Unfavorable,
- Informational Only

[Video tutorial on MyMGA testimony witness sign-up](#)

Testimony Timeline

Check the bill's webpage on the [MGA website](#) to identify the hearing date in both chambers.

Two business days prior to hearing, testimony sign-up option opens within the [MyMGA system](#). Find the bill number and select verbal, written, or both. Upload written testimony in PDF.

Submission deadline is strict!

- Tuesday hearings - Due the Fri before
- Wednesday hearings - Due on Monday
- Thursday hearings - Due on Tuesday

Sample Testimony - HB 223 (2025)

The Honorable Luke Clippinger, Chair
House Judiciary Committee
100 Taylor House Office Building
6 Bladen Street
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: TESTIMONY ON HB0223 - CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT INVESTIGATIONS
("KNOW BEFORE THEY KNOCK" FAMILY RIGHT TO NOTICE ACT) - POSITION:
INFORMATION ONLY

Dear Chair Clippinger and members of the Judiciary Committee:

The Maryland Department of Human Services (DHS) thanks the Committee for its consideration and appreciates the opportunity to provide a letter of information for House Bill 223, Family Law - Child Abuse and Neglect Investigations ("Know Before They Knock" Family Right to Notice Act).

With offices in every one of Maryland's jurisdictions, DHS empowers Marylanders to reach their full potential by providing preventative and supportive services, economic assistance, and meaningful connections to employment development and career opportunities. The Social Services Administration (SSA) within DHS implements the Child Protective Services (CPS) program, which is directly impacted by HB 223. As drafted, this bill requires local department of social services (LDSS) social workers investigating allegations of child abuse and neglect to provide an oral and written notice to the child's parent or guardian about their legal rights. The proposed notice closely resembles Constitutionally-required Miranda rights read to criminal suspects who are interrogated while in police custody.

DHS strongly supports increasing parents' access to legal information, but believes implementing the approach outlined in the bill will cause confusion for families and social workers by conflating child protective services with criminal investigations.

Address to relevant
committee leadership

Subject line: bill
number/name and position

In first sentence, restate your
organizational affiliation, bill
number and your position.

Describe problem bill is
trying to solve.

What does the bill do and
how will it address the
problem (or not)?

Sample Testimony (cont'd)

State regulation [COMAR 07.02.04.04 \(E\)](#) already requires DHS to distribute a “Parent’s Guide” (attached) at initial contact with a family, and to obtain the parents’ signature acknowledging they’ve received the guide. DHS is concerned that the enhanced processes the bill would require will impede our efforts at crucial cultural change by requiring social workers to more closely emulate process servers, usually Sheriff’s deputies. Process servers deliver formal legal notice requiring the parent’s signature to acknowledge receipt of rights, or document their refusal to sign. The bill would position child welfare social workers as police, process servers, and adversaries rather than partners. The bill requirements would put social workers in postures too similar to law enforcement and reduce our ability to partner with parents to strengthen and preserve families. DHS suggests changing the word “notice” in the bill to “information” or “notification” in keeping with the social worker’s role and authority. This change would ensure that parents receive important information about their rights without distorting the function of child welfare professionals or inadvertently initiating a punitive, adversarial dynamic.

National best practices validate that social workers have a role in providing information about legal resources for parents; but not in the prescriptive manner mirroring criminal investigation protocols outlined in HB 223. The National Association of Social Workers’ [Standard for Social Work Practice in Child Welfare](#) explains:

“The social worker must be able to assess current and imminent risk and ensure that arrangements are made to protect the child in accordance with state and federal laws, agency policies, and administrative directives governing child protection. Social workers in child welfare should be clear with the family about

Informational testimony sheds light on complex issues, educating legislators on existing state law and regulations, recent research, and state or national trends.

Use footnotes or hyperlinks to cite sources.

Define terms and clarify roles of various stakeholders.

Sample Testimony (cont'd)

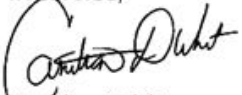
In alignment with national social work standards, DHS currently provides parents with information about legal rights and resources in our existing "Parent's Guide for Child Protective Services Investigations and Alternative Response." The Parent's Guide is distributed when a social worker initially contacts a family. Per [COMAR 07.02.04.04\(E.\)](#), caseworkers are required to request the caregiver's signature acknowledging receipt of the Parent's Guide. We included the Parent's Guide with this testimony. We are updating the Parent's Guide and offered to include more information about legal resources in the update. DHS also offered to include additional information about legal resources for parents on the DHS website.

Since 2023, DHS has shared our commitment to ensuring parents are informed of their rights and to facilitating legal representation through several conversations with the sponsor and the Office of the Public Defender (OPD). We built on our commitment by proudly partnering with OPD as they expand "[Better Together](#)." Better Together is

presidential Administration's priorities. We continue to discuss with OPD additional ways of informing the public about Better Together and facilitate access to legal services for parents with child welfare involvement. We are deeply committed to working with the sponsor and OPD to develop processes and regulations that expand parents' access to legal information and services in a manner that is trauma-informed and aligns with our family-centered, strengths-based Integrated Practice Model.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide informational testimony to the Committee for consideration during your deliberations. We look forward to the decision of the Committee and welcome continued collaboration on HB 223. If you require additional information, please contact Rachel Sledge, Director of Government Affairs, at rachel.sledge@maryland.gov.

In service,



Carnitra White
Principal Deputy Secretary

Describe current
practice and
Department policy

Validate problem,
illustrate partnerships

Extends offer for
continued negotiation
with sponsor and
advocates.

Conclusion restates
position, bill number,
and offer to collaborate.

Testimony signed by
Chair, other board
members can be named
on letterhead

Testimony Tips and Resources

- Accurate, brief, concise - 2 pages maximum
- Leverage existing talking points
 - DHS Gov. Affairs can provide background and/or our written testimony to help you get started
- Verbal testimony limited to 2 minutes
- Use formal letterhead identifying your board and membership, chair
- Other sample testimony:
 - [MD Commission for Women](#) (HB939 of 2025)
 - [DHS](#) on Know Before They Knock (HB223 of 2025)
- [2025 Senate testimony guidelines](#)
- [2025 House testimony guidelines](#)

The bill hearing is over, now what?

- Awaiting a vote in sub or full committee
- [MyMGA](#) has bill tracking functionality that can send you email updates as the bill's status changes.
- After crossover, bills that advanced to the opposite chamber have second committee hearing
 - Opportunity to re-submit written testimony
 - Be sure to modify the To line, check bill for any amendments made in the first chamber.

Advocacy Tools and Resources

- [MD General Assembly Website](#)
 - Bill search function - enter bill number (SB# or HB#)
 - Relevant committee's subpage will livestream bill hearings to watch online at your convenience
- Maryland Manual - [Legislative Roster by County](#)
- [Find My Representatives](#) - by mailing address
- [Session Calendar](#)
- [MyMGA](#) - testimony sign-up and bill tracking
- [More video tutorials](#) on MGA website
- DHS Gov. Affairs as an additional resource
 - dhs.governmentaffairs@maryland.gov

Reflection

Identify one advocacy action you and your board can take during the next legislative session. What are you looking forward to implementing?

Start small!

Your voice matters.

Questions?

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