Testimony Concerning HB 359
Child Neglect – Reporting –
Commission of a Crime of Violence in the Presence of a Minor
Submitted to the House Judiciary Committee
February 9, 2017

Position: Support with Amendment

Maryland Family Network (MFN) supports HB 359 with an amendment. This bill deems the commission of an act of violence in the presence of a child to be an act of child neglect, whether or not the person who committed the act of violence is criminally charged. MFN is sensitive to concerns about victims of domestic violence being inadvertently penalized by this legislation. We support an amendment specifying that a party found to be the non-aggressor shall not be held liable for child neglect.

As Maryland’s largest and oldest statewide child advocacy organization, MFN is strongly committed to ensuring the health and well-being of children across our state. MFN has worked since 1945 to improve the quality of life for Maryland children and their families. We are committed to a process that identifies and addresses factors affecting the well-being of children and youth.

Dr. Jack P. Shonkoff and his colleagues at Harvard’s Center on the Developing Child published a research paper in 2011 entitled *The Lifelong Effects of Early Childhood Adversity and Toxic Stress.*¹ The report concludes that exposure to violence in early childhood causes “toxic stress,” which can have a negative impact on a child’s brain development and cause persistent health problems throughout the child’s life. A child who is a witness to violent crime is an additional victim of the crime.

For these reasons, we urge you to give HB 359 a favorable with amendment report.