



Know Before They Knock

House Bill *** - Sponsor Delegate Charlotte A. Crutchfield
Senate Bill *** - Sponsor Senator Shaneka T. Henson

2026 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITY | FAMILY PRESERVATION

ISSUE: DSS investigates families without informing parents of their rights—leaving them scared and powerless. This lack of transparency causes trauma and family separation without making children safer.



HARM: **Racial injustice:** Black children are disproportionately placed in foster care—and the disparity begins with CPS investigations.



Constitutional rights denied: Parents are not informed of their legal protections, leaving them unable to exercise rights they already have.

IN 2022 BLACK CHILDREN COMPRISED 52.8% OF THE FOSTER SYSTEM BUT ONLY 30.6% OF MARYLAND'S CHILD POPULATION.

Unnecessary investigations: 93,256 children were subjects of CPS investigations (2019–2023) with no evidence of abuse or neglect found.

SOLUTION:



PROVIDE WRITTEN NOTICE OF RIGHTS

Know Before They Knock (KBTK) simply requires DSS to provide parents with a written notice of their rights prior to beginning an investigation.

This notice:

- Prevents unnecessary trauma
- Ensures parents know their rights
- Protects children while upholding due process

KBTK does not prevent CPS or law enforcement from entering a home and removing a child who is in serious, immediate danger



The Maryland Office of the Public Defender is the largest criminal defense firm in the State. Since 1972, we have been the state's foremost advocates for securing justice, protecting civil rights, and preserving liberty. Our work spans criminal, juvenile, parental defense, and involuntary commitment proceedings.

Contact: Elizabeth.Hilliard@maryland.gov, (443) 507-8414
Elizabeth Hilliard, Esq. Director of Government Relations

CONNECT WITH US

www.opd.state.md.us

@MarylandOPD


@Maryland_OPD

@Maryland_OPD


SAMPLE NOTICE OF PARENT'S RIGHTS

As a parent you have rights during a Child Protective Service Investigation or Assessment.


Read this notice to learn your rights **before** a CPS investigation or assessment begins.

 HOME ENTRY; You can refuse entry unless DSS has a court order OR your child is in serious, immediate danger (like needing urgent medical care).

 INFORMATION: You have the right to know exactly what allegations have been made against you.

 LEGAL REPRESENTATION: You have the right to speak with an attorney before talking to DSS, signing anything, or making agreements.

 YOUR CHILDREN: DSS cannot interview or examine your child without a court order—unless your child is in immediate danger.

 SELF-INCRIMINATION: Anything you, your children, or others say to DSS can and will be used against you in court.

 SIGNING DOCUMENTS: You do not have to sign any DSS documents—information releases, service agreements, medical releases, etc.

 REQUESTS: You can refuse DSS requests (drug tests, mental health evaluations) without a court order.

 DSS IS NOT YOUR LAWYER DSS representatives cannot give legal advice or predict what a judge will decide.

WARNING: Using your rights may have consequences, including DSS petitioning to remove your child from your home.

Pilot programs across the country demonstrate that informing parents of their rights streamlines investigations while maintaining child safety.



This sample advisement is for the Know Before they Knock Bill and not an actual advisement. If you have questions contact:

Elizabeth.Hilliard@maryland.gov, (443) 507-8414

Elizabeth Hilliard, Esq. Director of Government Relations