



Legislation Summary:

An Act authorizing the Commonwealth of Massachusetts to establish additional mandated reporters for the purpose of the protection and care of children

Bill number: S82

Chief Sponsor: Senator Paul Feeney

What the bill does, why LWVMA supports or opposes it, and the League position relative to this bill.

More reporting doesn't result in better identification of children at risk and is not associated with better outcomes for children. The harm that comes with unnecessary government intrusion in the lives of innocent families is ignored. Simply having an investigation opened can be traumatic, experts say, and numerous studies show that separating young children from their parents leads to increased risk of depression, developmental delays, attachment issues and post-traumatic stress disorder.

Expanding mandated reporting puts enormous pressure on the limited resources of the Massachusetts Department of Children & Families, diverting limited resources from endangered children. Presumptive pressure reinforced by potential legal penalties can result in huge increases in reports, stretching already stretched resources and calling upon social workers to increase their policing and investigations, taking time away from families that actually need help, makes social workers less effective workers and leads to increased burn out. Actual abused children are more likely to be missed due to exploding caseloads and burned-out workers.

According to data from the Children's Bureau at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS, 2020), almost half of all abuse cases (44%) referred to authorities in 2018 were screened-out and not investigated further. Of those that proceeded to be investigated (56%), just 16% were substantiated. Overall, then, only 9% of the initially referred cases were ultimately verified. Or, put another way, fully 91% of all reports of abuse turned out to be false positives, subjecting caretakers unnecessarily to a screening or surveillance process, and often to an ongoing investigation."

League Position: Oppose

Domestic Violence position:

The prevention of domestic violence. A strong statewide response to domestic violence that is integrated, interdisciplinary, and adequately funded, involving all segments of the criminal justice system, the medical community, the schools, social services, and the private sector, with a primary focus on the safety of victims. *Where We Stand*, p.38

Social Policy: Promote social and economic justice, secure equal rights for all and combat discrimination and poverty Where We Stand, p.34

Child abuse prevention and treatment: Measures to minimize trauma suffered by children in child abuse proceedings. Where We Stand, p.34