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HOUSE BILL NO. 839

Offered January 14, 2026

Prefiled January 13, 2026

A BILL to direct the Judicial Council of Virginia to convene a work group to study the implementation of provisions to improve procedures for and responses to victims of family abuse and their children in child custody proceedings; report.

Patron—McClure

Committee Referral Pending

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:

1. § 1. *That the Judicial Council of Virginia shall convene a work group to study the implementation of provisions to improve procedures for and responses to victims of family abuse and their children in child custody proceedings.*

The work group shall review, analyze, and make recommendations for how the juvenile and domestic relations district courts in the Commonwealth could improve custody proceedings when credible allegations of family abuse are at issue.

The work group shall review and consider certain information, including how (i) power dynamics in child custody matters impact outcomes, including how frequently alleged abusers gain custody of children; (ii) alleged abusers may use court proceedings as instruments of harassment; and (iii) perceptions of survivors of abuse may impact outcomes.

The work group shall review and consider certain actions, including (a) providing resources for affordable legal representation for abuse survivors in custody proceedings; (b) mandating judicial education on trauma, abuse, and power dynamics; (c) improving guardian ad litem trainings relating to power dynamics in family abuse; (d) providing greater oversight and accountability for judges; and (e) considering whether custody cases with credible abuse allegations should result in limited custody to the abuser.

The work group shall include representation from relevant stakeholders, including the Virginia Sexual and Domestic Violence Action Alliance, the Virginia Family Law Coalition, the Virginia Trial Lawyers Association, the Virginia Poverty Law Center, at least two guardians ad litem, at least two juvenile and domestic relations district court judges, and at least three survivors of family abuse.

The work group shall submit a report with its findings and recommendations to the Chairs of the House and Senate Committees for Courts of Justice by November 1, 2026.