What is Alternative Response?

Alternative Response is a better way to handle lower risk reports of child abuse and neglect that will result in safer kids, stronger families and significantly fewer recurrences. It uses a family “strength-based approach” for responding to a credible report that a child has been abused or neglected.

Under Alternative Response, the definitions of abuse and neglect are unchanged and the total number of cases accepted for intervention by Child Protective Services is not expected to change. The difference is that once a case is accepted, it will be assigned to one of two tracks: Traditional Response or Alternative Response. Higher risk reports including cases involving serious physical abuse or sexual abuse will be referred to the Traditional Response track and will be handled the same way they are today, resulting in a formal finding.

Lower risk reports can be pursued through Alternative Response. Local staff will take into consideration key factors including: the type of maltreatment, the level of risk of harm or endangerment to any child in the home, and the family’s history of involvement with the agency.

For cases on the Alternative Response track, the Department will work collaboratively with the family to assess their needs and provide services without the threat of a formal finding of abuse or neglect. Results in other states show that families are more receptive to this approach as they see their caseworker as someone who can help them rather than someone who is investigating them.

Alternative Response is a recognized best practice currently used in over 20 states and is endorsed by the National Council of State Legislatures, Casey Families Programs, and the American Humane Association. Maryland is in currently working with partners on a year-long planning process and will begin implementation in July 2013.

**Alternative Response: A better way to handle low risk reports of abuse or neglect**