

DATE: February 18, 2020

BILL NUMBER: SB564

COMMITTEE: Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

BILL TITLE: Education - High School Graduation Requirements - Students in Foster Care or Homeless Youth

DHS POSITION: Support

The Department of Human Services (the Department) respectfully submits this letter of support regarding Senate Bill 564. Senate Bill 564 works to allow students in foster care to complete high school on time with their peers in spite of placement changes.

This bill stands to benefit high school children in foster care who transfer schools while in grades 11 or 12 by assuring educational continuity and progress towards timely graduation. The Social Services Administration and Maryland State Department of Education have collaborated on education stability for this population, under the federal guidelines of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) education reform. Though the Department makes all efforts to maintain children and youth in their schools of origin when they enter care or change placements, they may experience jurisdictional changes due to level of care needed, best interest of the child, or placements availability. Although there are also efforts to maintain the school of origin during these jurisdictional changes, some students may experience a change in their school of attendance.

Having the out-of-home population potentially face multiple instances of local requirements that are in addition to those that are statewide and changing with each placement creates a barrier to timely graduation. The provisions of the bill would remove this barrier, decrease dropout rates, and have a positive impact on post-secondary education and workforce entry. This bill would also allow county school boards to maintain a level of local control over graduation requirements for students of this population. The local board may choose not to waive the requirements if the student is reasonably able to complete the county high school graduation requirements in time to graduate from high school.

For these reasons, the Maryland Department of Human Services supports this bill as it will allow vulnerable high school students to complete high school on time, provide educational stability, and decrease related stress in a high stress, traumatized population. The Department respectfully requests that the Committee return a favorable report for SB 564.