

**Testimony before House Judiciary Committee**

**February 27, 2020**

**House Bill 1342**

**Family Law – Removal of a Child from Home – Meetings**

**\*\* OPPOSE \*\***

On behalf of the National Association of Social Workers – Maryland Chapter, an organization representing social workers statewide, we are asking you to oppose House Bill 1342.

When Child Protective Services is considering the removal of a child from the home, Department of Human Services requires that a Family Involvement Meeting (FIM) be held. These meetings are designed to involve family members and those who support them – religious leaders, relatives, friends, providers, and others – in making this important child welfare decisions. During these meetings, the safety concerns are articulated, the strengths of the families (protective factors) are identified, and a decision made with input from all parties.

What this bill would do is to require the redaction of important demographic information such as names, sex, race, religion and less critical descriptors such as political affiliation and birth order or parents' education from the Family Involvement Meeting, or any other meeting where placement is discussed. Clearly at an in-person meeting race and sex are more evident; deleting use of names is awkward at best.

The decision to remove a child is never made lightly nor without considerable deliberation. When for whatever reason, a Family Involvement Meeting can't be held, the decision is one made by the caseworker and supervisor, often in consultation with other supervisors or administrators, and with the agency attorney but through no formal process. These are often crisis situations.

Being prohibited from including all available information – including past history of child maltreatment reports – in these consultations effectively strips a family of its identity, and the agency of its ability to include all available information in decision-making. And of course, should a child be removed from the home, having information like gender and sex is critical to sound decision-making about placement.

We understand that in Suffolk Co., New York, when a placement is considered a caseworker presents notes to a group of superiors to review, and the name, race, and address of the child is redacted. According to one article, this has proven successful in reducing racial disproportionality. We question that conclusion, as the [“2018 Monitoring and Analysis Profiles With Selected Trend Data: 2014-2018”](#) report from Nassau Co. indicated that 49.7% of new admissions in 2018 were children of color, in a community that's 10% African-American. Given that outcome, this is unlikely to be a model to emulate.

We appreciate the bill's intention to shield families in some way. However, were HB1342 to be passed, its requirements would simply hamper good decision-making by limiting available information without offering any enhanced or greater protection for the children.