

THE COALITION TO PROTECT MARYLAND'S CHILDREN

Our Mission: To combine and amplify the power of organizations and citizens working together to keep children safe from abuse and neglect. We strive to secure the budgetary and public policy resources to make meaningful and measurable improvements in safety, permanence, and well-being.

House Ways & Means Committee **HB 766 – Children-Residential Treatment Centers – Education Funding** Support

February 24, 2022

The Coalition to Protect Maryland's Children (CPMC) is a consortium of Maryland organizations and individuals formed in 1996 to promote meaningful child welfare reform. As HB 766 would allow youth to access intensive behavioral health services without child welfare involvement, CPMC urges a favorable report on this bill.

Preparing Maryland for a prosperous future begins with recognizing that our youngest residents must get what they need today to become the adults who will strengthen our communities and build our economy. Fortunately, what our youth need is not a mystery. Recent advances in the science of early childhood development tell us that the early years are a time when the brain is literally building itself from the ground up, in much the way a house is constructed. And, it is the relationships and experiences children have early in life that are the building blocks for the skills they need to remain healthy, and to succeed in school, in relationships, and in the workforce.

The child welfare system serves an important role in the care and protection of vulnerable children. However, children should only enter into it when absolutely necessary. Children should not have to enter the child welfare system simply because they need behavioral supports – we have a behavioral health system for that. Unfortunately, antiquated funding streams require some families to surrender physical custody of their children to the Department of Human Services in order for the youth to access treatment in a Residential Treatment Center.

Whether or not a child must use the child welfare system depends on whether the child has a non-public educational placement in their Individualized Educational Plan.

HB 766 seeks to fix this inequity. Children should be able to access the behavioral health treatment they need through the behavioral health system. Their educational services should not dictate the path they have to take.

Furthermore, families that are forced to surrender physical custody in order to receive educational funding are also obligated to pay child support based on their income. The child support is not for medical or residential costs – those are covered by the youth's insurance. Child support is levied simply because DHS is the funder of educational services.

For those reasons stated above we urge a favorable committee report on HB 766.