



February 21, 2023

House Bill 322

**Public Health – Home– and Community–Based Services for Children and Youth
House Health & Government Operations Committee**

Position: SUPPORT

The Maryland Association of Resources for Families and Youth (MARFY) is an association of private child caring organizations providing foster care, group homes, and other services through more than 200 programs across Maryland. The members of MARFY represent providers who serve Maryland's most vulnerable children who are in out of home placements due to abuse, neglect or severe mental health, and medical needs. We operate group homes, treatment foster care programs and independent living programs, primarily serving the foster care population as well as a juvenile services population.

If passed, House Bill 322 would require the Maryland Department of Health to expand access to and provide reimbursement for certain wraparound, intensive in-home, and case management services; requiring the Governor to include in the annual budget bill certain appropriations to fund certain behavioral health services and supports; and generally relating to home– and community–based services for children and youth.

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 and other such programs.

This bill will help save the lives of children in our state and will help to keep families together.
It is for these reasons we politely ask for a favorable report on House Bill 322.

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