



MARYLAND
CATHOLIC
CONFERENCE

February 15, 2024

House Bill 542
Department of Human Services – Children in Foster Care – Luggage
House Judiciary Committee

Position: Favorable

The Maryland Catholic Conference (MCC) is the public policy representative of the three (arch)dioceses serving Maryland, which together encompass over one million Marylanders. Statewide, their parishes, schools, hospitals, and numerous charities combine to form our state's second largest social service provider network, behind only our state government.

House Bill 542 requires then Maryland Department of Human Services to establish and maintain a decentralized supply of new luggage to be used to transport the personal belongings of child in foster care; requiring the Department to provide new luggage to a child who is being removed from a household under certain circumstances; requiring the Department to maintain certain records regarding luggage and children in foster care.

Some of our nation's most vulnerable youth are in foster care, with 4,237 children in foster care in Maryland as of 2022.¹ These children are placed in foster care for various reasons such as abandonment, death, incarceration, neglect, abuse, and voluntary placement. Foster care aims to provide a safe environment for children to live and grow. However, many children in foster care lack basic belongings. When moving between homes, their belongings are often packed in plastic trash bags, which diminishes their sense of worth. Providing foster children with their own luggage is essential for their well-being. It offers them a sense of dignity and value, showing them that they are not disposable. As Pope Francis noted, "every child is God's gift, in every case, and in whatever situation."² With their own luggage, foster children can have a constant and personal belonging, easing the transitions between homes. This bill aims to provide dignity and hope to foster youth, emphasizing their inherent value and importance in our communities.

For these reasons, the MCC asks for a favorable report on **HB 542**.

¹ <https://www.adoptuskids.org/adoption-and-foster-care/how-to-adopt-and-foster/state-information/maryland#:~:text=As%20of%202022%2C%20there%20are,of%2Dhome%20care%20in%20Maryland.>

² <https://gulfcatholic.org/pope-francis-adoption-every-child-arrives-gods-gift>

Thank you for your consideration.