



March 26, 2024

**Senate Bill 482- Family Law-Kinship Care
House Judiciary 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.

MARFY writes to express strong support for Senate Bill 708, a crucial piece of legislation aimed at redefining kinship care within our family law system. This bill not only seeks to broaden the definition of a relative for the purposes of child assistance but also enhances the kinship care program in the Department of Human Services, thereby improving the procedure for the placement of children in need of out-of-home placement.

Senate Bill 708's proposal to expand the definition of a "relative" to include kinship caregivers is a significant step forward in recognizing the diverse and inclusive nature of family structures in our society. By acknowledging kinship caregivers – those who may not be related by blood or marriage but share a strong familial or significant bond with the child – this legislation honors the reality of many children's lives and the depth of care provided by non-traditional guardians.

The enhancements to the kinship care program outlined in this bill are commendable. By establishing a preference for placing children with kinship caregivers in the absence of good cause to the contrary, the bill prioritizes the child's need for a stable and familiar environment. This approach not only benefits

the children in need of care but also supports the caregivers by recognizing and formalizing their role.

Overall, Senate Bill 708 represents a progressive and compassionate approach to the welfare of children in need of assistance. By recognizing the importance of kinship care and striving to improve the systems in place for out-of-home placement, this legislation stands as a testament to our community's commitment to the well-being of its most vulnerable members. I urge the committee and all legislators to support this bill, as it not only reflects our shared values of care and protection for children but also strengthens the legal framework supporting kinship care. **It is for these reasons we politely ask for a favorable report on Senate Bill 708.**

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