



**MARYLAND
LEGAL AID**

Advancing
**Human Rights and
Justice for All**

HB0542 - Department of Human Services - Children in Foster Care - Luggage

Hearing before the House Judiciary Committee,

Feb. 15, 2024

Position: FAVORABLE

Maryland Legal Aid (MLA) submits its written and oral testimony on HB0542 at the request of bill sponsor Delegate Joe Vogel.

MLA is a non-profit law firm that provides free legal services to the State's low-income and vulnerable residents. We serve residents in each of Maryland's 24 jurisdictions and handle a range of civil legal matters. MLA is Maryland's largest civil non-profit law firm, representing vulnerable young people in Child in Need of Assistance (CINA) matters across the State of Maryland. HB0542 is a vital measure to ensure that children who have been removed from their homes receive new luggage to be used to transport their personal belongings. MLA urges the Committee's favorable report on HB0542.

HB542 will help ensure dignity and humanity for the Children in Need of Assistance in Maryland, by ensuring that their belongings are transported in luggage. This would prevent the use of trash bags which have been used for many children in foster care. When a child who has been determined to be a Child in Need of Assistance is removed from their household, it can be traumatizing. The youth must adapt to a new placement, and possibly a new school. For many of our Children in Need of Assistance, they have been abused and/or neglected and come from backgrounds of instability and therefore understandably often do not feel valued.

In some unfortunate cases, insult is added to injury when their valued personal belongings are stuffed in trash bags. This is degrading to the youth and can undermine their self-worth. This bill will provide these youth with the dignity of bringing their belongings in new luggage.

Maryland Legal Aid has represented several Children in Need of Assistance recently who have had to move to new placements with their clothes shoved in plastics bags. We have attached a photo of a recent client's items stuffed into trash bags. When we put a youth's personal items in trash bags, it sends a direct message that their items are not valued or important and by extension they are not valued or important.

Some counties currently work with charities that provide luggage and backpacks, but others are not so fortunate. Every Child in Need of Assistance in the state of Maryland deserves to have the minimum dignity that this bill will provide.

Maryland Legal Aid urges the Committee to issue a FAVORABLE report on House Bill 542 and urge its ultimate passage. If you have any questions, please contact: Erica I. LeMon, Director of Advocacy for Children's Rights at elemon@mdl原因.org (410) 951-7648 or (410) 935-0937.



Photo of items belonging to a foster child placed in trash bags for transport.