

March 24, 2025

The Honorable Ben Barnes
Chairman, House Appropriations Committee
120 Taylor House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: Senate Bill 833 - Family Law - Treatment Foster Care Homes - Child Care Stipends for Private Providers
FAVORABLE

Dear Chairman Barnes and Members of the Committee,

First, thank you for your service and support to children and families all across Maryland. We are sincerely grateful for the opportunity to serve the most vulnerable children and families in the Child Welfare continuum. MENTOR Maryland has been serving children in foster care since 1991, supporting over 225 youth to have a home and familial support for over 47,000 collective nights per year.

Recruiting foster parents, particularly those who care for our most medically and behaviorally complex foster youth, has become increasingly more difficult. Despite heavy investment, state of the art recruiting tactics, and resources, we have seen a dramatic decline in foster families willing to take the journey to serve. Of those families we find who are open to becoming foster parents, less than 4% actually become licensed foster parents. This compares to a rate of 10% from the previous 5-year period.

One of the top three barriers to completing this journey is the lack of child-care and respite services available to those caring for complex youth. This is most starkly felt in our medically complex program. The reason for this is that, to care for medically complex youth, foster parents must have an adequate income while also being available to support the youth 24 hours a day. These requirements, coupled with the ever growing cost of living across the state requiring both potential foster parents to work full time, significantly limit that pool of individuals capable of caring for a medically complex child. However, enabling a stipend to support daily childcare would dramatically reduce these limiters, enabling a significant increase in the potential pool of foster parents.

Having an adequate network of high-quality foster care homes to care for complex youth not only yields better outcomes when compared to institutional and/or congregate settings, but it also saves the state significant amounts of general fund dollars. The average length of stay for a foster youth admitted to an inpatient setting in 2024 was 95 days. In 2024, it was reported that 102 youth were boarded in inpatient hospital rooms all across the state. That's an estimated cost of \$15.5M* in 2024, where youth could have potentially been served in their communities with loving foster families who are trained and equipped to handle complex and challenging medical and behavioral issues, at a much lower cost.

We need to do everything we can to support the foster families that chose to “say yes” to caring for vulnerable youth. This is why we are asking for your support of SB833, which will help advance the policy to extend state child care subsidies to Treatment Foster Care Families by establishing a workgroup. We are

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*\$15.5M based on the average daily rate of \$1,600 per day in a hospital bed in GF revenue. This estimate does not include total cost of care and additional billable services received.

hopeful that by elevating this issue through the workgroup, we can work towards the funding and policy change necessary to improve the lives of Maryland's Foster Care families.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jonathan Saltman', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Jonathan Saltman
MENTOR Maryland State Director
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