



DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

Wes Moore, Governor · Aruna Miller, Lt. Governor · Rafael López, Secretary

March 20, 2025

The Honorable Will C. Smith, Jr., Chair
Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
2 East, Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

**RE: TESTIMONY ON HB0243 - FAMILY LAW - ADOPTION OF AN ADULT - POSITION:
FAVORABLE**

Dear Chair Smith and Members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee:

The Maryland Department of Human Services (DHS) thanks the Committee for its consideration and respectfully requests a favorable position for House Bill 243 (HB 243).

With offices in every one of Maryland's jurisdictions, DHS empowers Marylanders to reach their full potential by providing preventative and supportive services, economic assistance, and meaningful connections to employment development and career opportunities. Our Social Services Administration (SSA) implements child and family well-being and Adult Services programs, serving individuals whose lives would be positively impacted by the passage of HB 243. The bill supports the Department's efforts to improve services, permanency, and family connections for older youth entering adulthood.

Rooted in all of our practices is the guiding principle that Family Matters. HB 243 supports our efforts in reversing Maryland's history of older youth "aging out" of foster care. Through our Family Matters initiative we focus on empowering families and youth in out-of-home placements to build stronger, lasting bonds with family, whether by blood or by choice. Youth who exit care without permanent connections to adults face challenges in establishing themselves as young adults and creating stability in their life. Currently 1 out of 5 youth experience homelessness, 50% face difficulty gaining employment, and over 50% are involved with the juvenile justice

system. Moreover, about half of young adults live with their parents today, and youth in care deserve the same opportunities for support and success as their non-fostered peers.

HB 243 supports older youth establishing permanent family connections by empowering youth over 18 years old to consent to their own adoption. As of January 23, 2025, the Department has 101 youth, age 18 or older who have been with the same foster family or kin family for the past 18 months. HB 243 reduces barriers to adult adoption and empowers young adults and their families to decide if adoption is right for them.

Youth who emancipate from foster care, even if emotionally connected to an adult, do not have the same rights as a child who is adopted. HB 243 empowers families to choose adoption with less administrative burden, providing additional benefits for the adoptee, including the ability to receive Social Security benefits of the parent(s) and inheritance through intestate succession laws. Further, in the event of medical emergencies, it is important for adults to have trusted individuals who can help make life or death medical decisions and receive medical records. We believe in empowering Marylanders with choices over their medical decisions which respect their life and dignity. The bill will help fortify chosen families to make medical decisions and protect them from potential harm during times of distress.

We appreciate the opportunity to offer favorable testimony to the Committee for consideration during your deliberations. If you require additional information, please contact Rachel Sledge, Director of Government Affairs, at rachel.sledge@maryland.gov.

In service,



Carnitra White
Principal Deputy Secretary