

HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE

HOUSE BILL 915: WORKGROUP ON AGING OUT OF FOSTER CARE

March 19, 2026

Position: Favorable

Disability Rights Maryland (DRM), a nonprofit legal advocacy organization, is the federally-mandated Protection and Advocacy agency for the state of Maryland, charged with defending and advancing the rights of individuals with disabilities. Over the past 40 years, DRM has dedicated significant resources to representation of foster children with disabilities and to students with disabilities entitled to transition planning for post-secondary life.

DRM supports House Bill 915 (HB 915), which would establish a Workgroup on Aging Out of Foster Care to identify the types of resources available for youth who have aged out of foster care to help them achieve self-sufficiency, determine the effectiveness of currently available resources and identify the challenges with current services and programs offered before a youth ages out of the system. HB 915 would also require the Workgroup to submit a report of its findings and recommendations by July 1, 2027, to the General Assembly.

Transition services are essential to prepare students with disabilities for post-secondary life. The Maryland foster care system has a significant population of students with disabilities. In the 2021-2022 school year, more than 44% of students in foster care had an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or a Section 504 Plan.¹ Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), these students have the right to “a free appropriate public education that emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs and to prepare them for further education, employment, and independent living.”² It is important to collect data about transition services and their effectiveness in order to ensure students with disabilities in foster care receive the appropriate and individualized transition services they are entitled to under the IDEA and to ensure that their exit from the foster care system is well-planned and smooth.

Significantly, the IDEA transition regulations require the IEP team to invite agencies that may be involved after a student exits the education system to participate in the transition

¹ MARYLAND STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, *December 2023 Legislative Report Maryland Public Schools Students in the State Child Welfare System*, at p. 7.

² 20 U.S.C. §1400(d).

planning process. Participation by the student's local department of social services is important in order to identify and implement a holistic approach to supporting the student through their transition and afterwards. Otherwise, students risk exit from both the foster care and education systems at the same time with no clear path to life in the community with the supports they need. The gap in transition services for these youth is reflected in housing, employment, and education outcomes.³ HB 915 will ensure that Maryland has the information necessary to change these outcomes for youth in foster care.

HB 915 is also consistent with the General Assembly's commitment to preparing transition-aged students with disabilities with the services needed to be successful in post-secondary life. Maryland has gone beyond federal law by requiring that transition planning for students with disabilities begin at age 14. HB 915 helps ensure the individualized needs of students with disabilities in foster care are accounted for in Maryland's efforts to support transition-aged students.

DRM appreciates being included as a workgroup member, allowing us to contribute our expertise in both foster care and disability to the work of the group.

For these reasons, DRM supports HB 915 and urges a favorable report.

Contact: Leslie Seid Margolis at lesliem@disabilityrightsmd.org or 443-692-2505 or Brittany Askin at brittanya@disabilityrightsmd.org or 443-692-2525.

³ In 2025, across four groups of 21-year-old youths transitioning out of foster care in Maryland, at least 43 % of each group were unemployed. See *Youth transitioning out of foster care: Currently employed part- or full-time* | KIDS COUNT Data Center. From 2013-2018, the rates of community college enrollment for youth exiting foster care declined each year. See MARYLAND LONGITUDINAL DATA SYSTEM CENTER, *Foster Care and Higher Education Participation* (2023), at p. 3. Between the last two school years with reported data, there was a 7% decrease in the rate of youth exiting foster care attending a Maryland four-year higher education institution. *Id.* One study found that beyond the first three months of having exited foster care in Maryland, 100% of youth had or were currently experiencing housing instability. See YOUTH REACH MD, *Youth Homelessness Among Foster Care Alumni*, at p.2