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Honorable Chair Bartlett and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of CASA of Cecil County, we submit testimony in support of House Bill 980, *Kanaiyah's Law*.

HB 980 strengthens Maryland's child protection system by establishing critical safeguards for children placed under guardianship, expanding criminal history record check requirements to include adults residing in a guardian's home, and prohibiting the placement of children in unlicensed settings such as hotels or other nonresidential environments. The bill also creates the Office of the Child Welfare Ombudsman within the Office of the Attorney General to provide a transparent and accessible complaint process for children, families, and stakeholders involved in the child welfare system.

From CASA's direct work in child welfare cases, we know that children who have experienced abuse or neglect require not only permanency, but continued safety and accountability even after a guardianship order is entered. CASA volunteers frequently work with children whose stability depends on the reliability of their placement environment and the system's ability to identify risks before harm occurs. Ensuring that all adults in a guardian's household undergo appropriate background checks and preventing placements in unsafe, unlicensed settings are essential protections for vulnerable children.

By strengthening oversight, improving placement standards, and establishing an independent Office of the Child Welfare Ombudsman, HB 980 enhances Maryland's ability to protect children, respond to concerns in a timely manner, and promote public confidence in the child welfare system.

CASA of Cecil County strongly urges a favorable report on HB 980.

Respectfully submitted,
Grant Handley
CASA of Cecil County



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