



HB396 - Residential Child Care Programs - Education of Children and Training of Child and Youth Care Practitioners

Position: Support
Hearing Date: February 11, 2026
Committee: Ways & Means

The Maryland Coalition of Families (MCF) is a statewide nonprofit organization that provides family peer support services at no cost to families who have a child or other loved one with a mental health, substance use, or problem gambling disorder. As experienced caregivers, we provide support, guidance, and hope to people who love or care for someone with a behavioral health challenge and advocate to improve the systems they rely on.

MCF represents the voice of thousands of Maryland families who love someone with a behavioral health challenge. The children of many of our staff and the families we support have been placed in residential care at some point in their young lives. HB396 speaks directly to a need we have seen firsthand.

Children are placed in residential care because they are experiencing a behavioral health crisis that requires a temporary removal from their home, their community, and their school. They arrive at these facilities after a series of events that are often traumatic and disruptive to them and their families. Friendships are damaged, family relationships are strained, involvement in extracurricular activities is suspended, and academic pursuits are stalled.

Their placement in residential care is intended to restore stability and teach them essential skills to manage their behavioral health needs. Essentially, their lives are put on hold while they tend to their emotional wellbeing. But this pause comes with a cost, particularly to their education. Placement in a residential setting can mean routines are disrupted, educational supports are altered, and time otherwise devoted to schoolwork and extracurricular activities is diverted into helping the young person regain stability and restore their mental wellbeing. By the time the young person returns to school in their community, they have fallen behind their peers academically and lost connection to activities that build their confidence, teach valuable life skills, and promote positive social relationships.

HB396 will ensure that children placed in residential care facilities have the opportunity to remain engaged with their educational goals as well as extracurricular activities. This bill bridges the gap between a child's customary school setting and their residential one. Regularly scheduled time to study, assistance with homework assignments, projects, and test preparation, and support for ensuring the child's Individualized Education Plans or 504 Plan goals are met will provide crucial continuity and mitigate the possibility that they will fall behind academically. Offering support to engage in extracurricular activities provides a child with an outlet for hobbies that bring them joy and foster relationships with others who share those same interests.

Most importantly, HB396 ensures that residential care facility staff have the training, skills, and knowledge to provide a child with the level of care and support they need to make a smooth transition from the residential setting back to their own community when ready. Investing in



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training staff is an investment in helping young people capitalize on the purpose of residential care settings and gives them the best possible chance of success when they return to their community.

As one parent we support noted, "If passed, this legislation will significantly improve the educational experience of students in residential care. These students are especially vulnerable and deserving of opportunities to improve their educational experience and outcomes."

MCF urges the committee to vote in favor of HB396. Thank you.