

# **HB0396: Residential Child Care Programs - Education of Children and Training of Child and Youth Care Practitioners February 11th, 2026**

Good afternoon, Chairwomen Wilkins, Vice Chair Feldmark, and members of the Ways and Means Committee.

My name is Gavin Falcón, and I am a Junior at Long Reach High School in Howard County. In addition, I am the Howard County Association of Student Councils, or HCASC, President and while I am testifying in my personal capacity I will be noting experience from this role.

With that being said I written this in support of HB0396, Residential Child Care Programs – Education of Children and Training of Child and Youth Care Practitioners.

As students, we talk a lot about educational equity, making sure every student has a fair chance to succeed no matter their circumstances. That has to include students living in residential child care programs, many of whom are already dealing with instability, school changes, or challenges outside the classroom that goes unnoticed for far too long.

When I first read this bill, I was honestly shocked, and really concerned, that some of these expectations are not already consistently standard practice. Things like making sure students have time to study, help with assignments, and adults who are actively communicating with their teachers feel like the bare minimum. Sadly though without this legislation this isn't the case state-wide.

I've had friends and classmates here in Howard County who have been in foster care or group home settings, and I've seen how quickly school can become overwhelming when there isn't consistent support outside the classroom.

Specifically from my experience and the bless opportunities I have had; missing assignments, no one checking in on you, etc... can snowball into students like myself falling behind. Now imagine, if I have those stressors in my privileged life, what about students who are managing and dealing with so much more.

HB0396 helps close that gap by requiring residential programs to prioritize education, making sure students are enrolled, their records transfer quickly, they have structured time to study, help with homework, and encouragement to participate in extracurriculars.

As a student athlete and a student involved in student government, extracurriculars make up my life and bring the joy to my schooling, a joy that every student in Maryland deserves.

The bill also strengthens training requirements for child and youth care practitioners so the adults working closest with these students understand child development, different learning needs, behavioral supports, and how to respond when something is impacting a student's ability to succeed. Once again common sense training for our youth.

So at the end of the day, where a student lives should not determine how much support they receive in their education. **Equity means the students with the least stability should receive the most intentional support.**

HB0396 moves Maryland closer to that goal.

For those reasons, I respectfully urge a favorable report on HB0396.

Thank you for your time