

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2026 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
First Reader

House Bill 570
Judiciary

(Delegate Grammer)

Foster Care – Adjacent County Applicants and Reporting Requirements

This bill authorizes an individual to apply to be approved as a foster parent by a local department of social services where the individual primarily resides or an adjacent county. A local department of social services is prohibited from denying an individual’s application to be a foster parent due to the individual’s county of primary residence if the individual primarily resides in the same county as, or an adjacent county to, where the local department is located. The bill requires each local department of social services to report to the Department of Human Services (DHS) quarterly on the number of (1) children in the county who are waiting to be placed in a foster home and (2) vacant foster care placements in approved foster homes in the county.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: *Potential* significant increase in general fund expenditures for DHS beginning in FY 2027, as discussed below, including one-time programming costs of \$40,000 in FY 2027 only. No material impact on revenues.

Local Effect: The bill is not anticipated to materially affect local government operations or finances.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Current Law: DHS, through its Social Services Administration, has the primary responsibility for child welfare services throughout the State, which are provided primarily by the local departments of social services.

DHS is required to establish a program of out-of-home placement for minor children (1) who are placed in the custody of a local department, for a period of up to 180 days, by a parent or legal guardian under a voluntary placement agreement; (2) who are abused, abandoned, neglected, or dependent, if a juvenile court has determined that continued residence in the child's home is contrary to the child's welfare and has committed the child to the custody or guardianship of a local department; or (3) who, with the approval of DHS, are placed in an out-of-home placement by a local department under a voluntary placement agreement regarding a child with a developmental disability or a mental illness, as specified.

An out-of-home placement may include family foster care, group and residential care, kinship care, and treatment foster care. "Foster care" means continuous 24-hour care and supportive services provided for a minor child placed by a child placement agency in an approved family home. Pursuant to regulations, an individual must apply to become a foster care provider (licensed resource parent) at the local department in the jurisdiction where the individual resides.

State/Local Expenditures: DHS advises that implementation of the bill requires, in addition to other resources, 48 staff (24 social workers and 24 family support workers) to manage increased workloads across expanded geographical areas, at an annual cost of approximately \$5.3 million.

According to DHS, implementation of the bill necessitates the need for more staff at local departments to, among other things, be prepared to handle a potential influx in applications from adjacent jurisdictions. Current staffing levels at local departments are in line with county populations – if foster care applicants in a larger jurisdiction instead seek approval in an adjacent county with fewer resources, the smaller county may not have sufficient staff to accommodate the applicant without adding staff. DHS notes that social workers have 120 days from their first visit to approve a home study applicant, which entails required training facilitated by staff, background and safety checks, and writing a comprehensive assessment of each applicant.

The aforementioned staff are also needed, according to DHS, to support families in various ways (*e.g.*, arranging respite care, assisting with locating training opportunities, explaining court processes, etc.) once a provider is licensed within a particular jurisdiction. Although the Department of Legislative Services (DLS) was unable to fully assess the information from DHS in time for publication of this fiscal and policy note, other impacts cited by DHS include those related to school transportation and the need for various system updates.

DLS notes, however, that increased workloads are largely dependent on the extent to which individuals apply for foster care approval in adjacent jurisdictions (and how/if current practices may change to facilitate additional cooperation between local departments). DHS

did not provide any data to estimate specific needs by jurisdiction, and how the specific staffing assumptions were developed. DLS can therefore not independently verify the estimated need for resources provided by DHS at this time. *For illustrative purposes only*, to the extent that an additional social worker is required, general fund expenditures increase by approximately \$98,000 on an annual basis; to the extent an additional family support worker is required, general fund expenditures increase by approximately \$80,600 on an annual basis. Regardless, general fund expenditures are anticipated to increase by approximately \$40,000 in fiscal 2027 only for programming necessary to complete the required report.

Additional Information

Recent Prior Introductions: Similar legislation has not been introduced within the last three years.

Designated Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Montgomery County; Department of Human Services; Department of Legislative Services

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me/jkb

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