

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2026 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
First Reader

House Bill 923
Judiciary

(Delegate Moreno)

Family Law - Equity Courts - Care and Custody of Children (Uniform
Nondiscrimination in Treatment and Evidence (UNITE) Act)

This bill establishes that it is the intent of the General Assembly that in all matters involving the care and custody of children, equity courts must protect against discriminatory practices, implicit biases, and procedural disparities that could harm a child’s stability or long-term welfare, including, for immigrant children, the ability to seek Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS). An equity court must apply the same standards (including evidentiary standards) and procedures (including the use of the same documents) in a proceeding for custody or guardianship of an immigrant child that are applied in a proceeding for custody or guardianship of a child who is a U.S. citizen.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: The bill does not materially affect State operations or finances, including the workload of the Judiciary.

Local Effect: The bill does not materially affect local government operations or finances, including the workloads of the circuit courts.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Current Law: The circuit courts are the highest common law and equity courts of record exercising original jurisdiction within the State. An equity court has jurisdiction over specified matters, including (1) the adoption, custody, or guardianship of a child, except for a child who is under the jurisdiction of any juvenile court and who previously has been

adjudicated to be a child in need of assistance; (2) visitation of a child; (3) support of a child; and (4) custody or guardianship of an immigrant child pursuant to a motion for Special Immigrant Juvenile factual findings requesting a determination that the child was abused, neglected, or abandoned before the age of 18 for purposes of the federal Immigration and Nationality Act (INA).

SIJS is a designation under INA to assist certain undocumented children in obtaining lawful permanent residency. To qualify, one must have been abused, abandoned, or neglected by at least one of the parents. Youth are allowed to qualify for SIJS until age 21. To obtain SIJS, an individual must initiate the process by obtaining a court order containing specific factual findings, including that the child cannot be reunited with one or both parents because of abuse, abandonment, or neglect.

Additional Information

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

Designated Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Judiciary (Administrative Office of the Courts); Department of Human Services; Department of Legislative Services

Fiscal Note History: First Reader - February 24, 2026
caw/jkb

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