

EQUITY FOR ALL KIDS



To: The Judicial Proceedings Committee
From: Rachel White, JD, Child Welfare Policy Director
Re: SB662-State Child Welfare System- Reporting
Date: February 25, 2020
Position: Support

Maryland's child welfare system exists to protect and care for Maryland's children in a manner that keeps them safe and healthy and promotes their well-being. The children and families served by the child welfare system, as well as the public, must have a high level of confidence that the system will act in a child's best interests and will respond to the child's needs by providing the services and interventions best matched with that child's specific needs, to include their educational attainment.

To engender this high level of confidence in both the child welfare system and the education system, it is important that children and families who become involved in the child welfare system, mandatory reporters, advocates and the general public have well-publicized, easily accessible, and transparent data indicating the outcomes and experiences of the children involved in the child welfare system. Currently the Department of Human Resources (DHR) releases monthly data and a yearly report with data of children involved with the child welfare system, SB 662 will help fill some of the gaps in the data already provided by DHR.

In addition, this bill will require the Maryland State Department of Education to report on the educational outcomes for youth in care. Under the federal, Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), beginning with the 2017-2018 school year, MSDE is required to make available disaggregated data on graduation rates and the academic performance for students in foster care. While this is a start, this information is just the tip of the iceberg and in fact the federal government encourages state collaboration between MSDE and the Department of Human Services to potentially go beyond the ESSA data points to ensure meaningful statewide data.

A best practice for youth in foster care is to ensure that siblings are placed together when it is in the best interest of all children. SB 662 will require that DHS collects data on the placements of siblings groups and make the information publicly available, and that it is disaggregated by race and ethnicity to help ensure that there are no racial disparities in outcomes for Maryland's families involved with the child welfare system. Also, educational outcome data is not provided to the public on a consistent basis in DHS' annual Child Welfare Performance Indicators Report. To help facilitate data sharing between MSDE and DHS, this bill requires MSDE to report and make publicly available the educational outcomes for youth in

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foster care. This information must be made available to DHS, the General Assembly and members of the general public.

Such indicators that MSDE will be required to report on are: the stability of school placements, the number of youth with Individualized Education Plans, the number of youth who have been retained, the number youth who have withdrawn from school, rates of absenteeism, and school disciplinary data.

To improve child welfare outcomes and to foster best practices, there must be effective accountability mechanisms, including the availability of data on outcomes disaggregated by age, gender identity, race, and ethnicity, as required by SB662. We urge this Committee to issue a favorable report so we have disaggregated data to evaluate how best to meet the needs of the children and families involved with Maryland's child welfare system.