

THE COALITION TO PROTECT MARYLAND'S CHILDREN

Our Mission: To combine and amplify the power of organizations and citizens working together to keep children safe from abuse and neglect. We strive to secure the budgetary and public policy resources to make meaningful and measurable improvements in safety, permanence, and well-being.

Judiciary Committee
HB1342: Family Law-Removal of Children Meetings
Positions: OPPOSE
February 27, 2020

The Coalition to Protect Maryland's Children (CPMC)¹ is a consortium of Maryland organizations and individuals formed in 1996 to promote meaningful child welfare reform and the prevention of child abuse and neglect.. CPMC opposes passage of bill #HB 1342- Family Law Removal of Children-Meetings

The child welfare system is not immune to racial and other biases. There are four levels of racism defined by The Center for Racial Justice Innovation: Individual or Internalized racism, Institutional which occurs within institutions and systems of power, and Structural which occurs among institutions and across society. The greatest opportunity for disparity by race in child welfare is when families first come into contact with the child welfare system* Utilizing data to track removals, education that includes cultural sensitivity literacy, supervision and oversight at the local department of social services level are ways to assess and address racial and other biases in child welfare, and during removals. Maryland adopted the practice of utilizing Family Involvement Meetings (FIM) also known as Family Team Decision Meetings which is in keeping with Family Centered Practice. Family Centered Practice focuses on the child's safety within their family and community, identifying strengths and includes the family, supports in the family and in the community.

Family Involvement Meetings (FIM) also known as Family Team Decision Meetings are meetings that occur to discuss any safety concerns and to make a plan prior to removal. The goal is to prevent removal and foster care placement. Families are invited to the meetings and encouraged to bring others for support. Identified supports such as relatives, neighbors, providers and religious leaders can attend. Decisions are made by the team that meets and would include a local department of social services social workers but generally not administrators. The proposed information to be redacted in this bill during an FIM is pertinent information needed for consideration for appropriate placement matches and services.

Decisions regarding a removal are often made when there is a crisis and immediate need to remove a child for safety. In these instances there would not be a meeting prior to the removal. Instead a decision would likely be made during a conversation with a social worker and supervisor, possibly with a department attorney included.

There is racial disproportion in child welfare and in foster care despite policy and processes already in place. However, this bill would not address issues of racial or other biases. The bill is not in the best interest of children and would not accomplish anything more for the protection of children.

For the reasons stated above, The Coalition to Protect Maryland's Children (CPMC) urges an unfavorable committee report on HB1342: Family Law-Removal of Children Meetings.

¹ Associated Catholic Charities, Baltimore Child Abuse Center, Baltimore Child Abuse Center, Citizens Review Board, Court Appointed Special Advocates, The Family Tree, The Franklin Law Group, MD Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers, Fostering Change Network, Diana Phillip