

EQUITY FOR ALL KIDS



To: The Appropriations Committee
From: Rachel White, JD, Child Welfare Policy Director
Re: HB258-State Child Welfare System- Reporting
Date: January 20, 2021
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 in the most equitable way. Current Maryland child welfare data highlights that black youth fare worse than their white peers on every child welfare indicator from point of entry to exit. Black children are more likely to enter the foster care system, more likely to be placed in a congregate care setting, and less likely to be adopted.ⁱ

Racial disparities and inequities within the child welfare system can only be eliminated if there is high-quality information by which to track immediate problems and underlying social determinants, as well as to guide the design and application of culturally specific interventions to meet the needs of the family and children the child welfare system serves. Interventions must be targeted across social systems and will require a collaborative approach amongst state agencies to include the Department of Human Services and the Maryland State Department of Education.

Currently the Department of Human Services (DHS) releases a yearly outcome data report for youth involved in the child welfare system, disaggregated by race, however there are gaps in the existing data collected. For example, DHS does not make publicly available the stability of mental health services, medication, or the number of youth with an Individualized Education Plan. HB 258 will require DHS to collect this information and make it publicly available.

HB 258 will also require the Maryland State Department of Education to report on the educational outcomes for youth in foster care to include graduation rates, college acceptance rates, school disciplinary data, and IEP data with the goal of creating targeted interventions to improve student outcomes. It is important to note that several of the data points required by HB 258 are currently being collected by MSDE, it is a matter of making the information publicly available. We attempted to discuss implications of the bill with the government affairs at MSDE, however MSDE was unwilling to engage.

To engender high confidence in the services provided to youth within the child welfare system and to deploy targeted interventions, it is imperative that this Committee issues a favorable report adopting sponsored amendments on HB 258 as it allows us to best meet the needs of the children and families.

For more information on our position, please contact Rachel White, Child Welfare Policy Director at rwhite@acy.org

ⁱ 2019 Maryland's Department of Human Services, Child Welfare Indicator Report