



To: The Appropriations Committee

From: Janice Goldwater, LCSW-C, CEO Adoptions Together and appointed member of the Maryland State Council on Child Abuse and Neglect

Re: HB 258-State Child Welfare System-Reporting

Date: January 20, 2021

Position: Support

The purpose of a child welfare system is to ensure the safety, security, protection, and well-being of children. For the last thirty years Adoptions Together has worked in Maryland to ensure that children unable to be raised in the family they were born into have the chance for a permanent family of their own. We work in partnership with local department of social services to find parents for children in need of a permanent family, providing counseling services and family finding programs. Over the years we have seen a disparity between the number of black children in need of a family as compared to the general population in Maryland. 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.

To fully understand what is happening and what needs to change, we need data to adequately tell the story. Racial disparities and inequities within the child welfare system can only be eliminated when we know where the break down exists. We need high-quality information by which to track immediate problems and underlying social determinants, as well as to guide the design of culturally specific interventions to meet the needs of the family and children the child welfare system serves.

Currently, the Department of Human Services (DHS) releases a yearly outcome report for youth involved in the child welfare system, disaggregated by race, however there are gaps in the existing data collected. If DHS provided data on the stability of mental health services, medication usage, status of IEP's and other factors we would have a much more accurate picture of what is going on. This information would allow us to design and deliver even more effective programming to ensure the success of all children and youth served. 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 (MSDE) to report on the educational outcome 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. Please note that several of these data points required by HB 258 are currently being collected by MSDE and this legislation will make this information available to the public for analysis.

This past year has brought so many racial disparities to our awareness and now is the time to take action to begin to address the disparate treatment of children and families based on race. 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 support and propel HB 258 to ensure children and families in Maryland are getting the best and most equitable services possible.

If there is any additional information I can provide, you may reach me at JGoldwater@Adoptionstogether.org or 301-422-5125.

Thank you so much for your consideration.