

Written Testimony of Generations United

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Thank you for the opportunity to provide written comment on Family Law Grandparent Visitation Bill H.B. 0973. I submit testimony on behalf of Generations United in Washington, DC, home to the National Center on Grandfamilies, a leading voice for families headed by grandparents, other relatives and close family friends.

H.R. 0973 takes important steps to promote continuity of the relationship between the grandparent and grandchild which may help reduce the trauma children experience when they are separated from grandparents who served as their primary caregivers for a year or more.

More than 2.7 million children are being raised by grandparents, other relatives and close family friends, 49,000 of which are in Maryland. When children cannot remain with their parents, grandparents who step in to care for them help the children maintain family connections, ties to their cultural heritage, and mostly importantly promote safety and stability.

When children who have lived with their grandparents are able to return to their parents' care, maintaining visitation and connections with their grandparent caregivers can be critical to reduce the stress, anxiety and trauma that comes with multiple transitions for children. This includes cases where a child has been raised by grandparents for extended periods of time without the child's parent in the home, then the parent abruptly returns to claim the child. That type of traumatic transition can be mitigated by allowing for an ongoing grandparent relationship with that child through visitation, which this bill would permit, while also providing safeguards for the parents and child by requiring the court to make a best interest for the child determination before granting visitation.

About Generations United

Founded in 1986, Generations United's mission is to improve the lives of children, youth, and older adults through intergenerational collaboration, public policies and programs for the enduring benefit for all. In 1999, Generations United established the National Center on Grandfamilies, a leading voice for families headed by grandparents, other relatives and close family friends. Center staff conducts federal advocacy, provides technical assistance to state policy makers and advocates and trains grandfamilies to advocate for themselves. The Center's network includes a broad group of organizations which provide a range of services to grandfamilies across the country including support groups, information and referral, case management, legal assistance, training and financial assistance. The Center has also championed an array of successful legislation to improve critical supports and services. It provides a range of information and resources available at www.gu.org and www.grandfamilies.org.