



Stephanie S. Franklin

Ashley D. Edwards
Stephanie L. Bryant
Cherie J. Jones
L. Lydia Rose

Testimony before the House Judiciary Committee
House Bill 930
Family Law – Removal of Child From Home - Meetings
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****OPPOSE****

The Franklin Law Group, P.C. (FLG) is a child advocacy law firm that has provided legal representation to children in abuse and neglect proceedings in six-jurisdictions across the State of Maryland since 2007. The FLG opposes House Bill 930.

This bill seeks to redact demographic information in removal decisions of children from the child's home. This has been offered as a solution to reduce the disproportionate numbers of Black children engaged in the child welfare system. And while the FLG agrees this is an enormous problem that needs to be corrected, the method offered by this bill is not the answer.

A. Failed Historic Redress, Responsibility, Accountability & Cultural Erasure

Failure to address and repair this nation's tortured racial history and its intersecting harms is compounding the disproportionate removals of Black children, specifically those who are descendants of captive and enslaved Africans in the U.S. (DCAUS).¹ The child welfare system is one of the many interdependent public systems that harm Black children and families. Black (DCAUS) children and families have been victims to historic violence and family separation, reflective of today's child welfare system.² Continued dehumanization, invisibility, and neglect are mainstays for DCAUS families' fight for recognition, dignity, and justice. Passage of this bill is a reductionist, short sighted strategy to address a centuries-long crime that requires a deeper lean-in and individual and systemic responsibility and accountability. Erasing racial and ethnic identity allows local departments immunity from account for their individual and systemic failures, and erases cultural identity – the cornerstone of families and a necessary marker for placement and supportive resources that are tailored to families' unique needs.

B. Mechanism to Address Disproportionality of Black Children & Families

Passing legislation implementing a statewide Racial Disparities Task Force for Black Children Engaged with the Child Welfare System can be a solution to address disproportionality of

¹ Stephanie S. Franklin, Esq. "In Search of Reparatory Justice: A Child-Family Welfare Act for Black Descendants of Captive and Enslaved Africans in the U.S." The Guardian – National Association of Counsel for Children, p. 1-11 (Fall 2020).

² *Id.*

Black children and families engaged in the child welfare system. The purpose of this Task Force would be to make solid legislative recommendations to policy makers to reduce the disparities of Black, in particular DCAUS, children and families engaged in the child welfare system. This Task Force must include competent, expertly-informed individuals knowledgeable of Black-DCAUS history, experience, and needs and other Black ethnicities; be multi-disciplinary; and include directly impacted individuals (parents and children who were involved in the child welfare system).

We urge this Committee to give an unfavorable report.