



HB 406 – Children in Out-of-Home Placements – Placement in Medical Facilities

Committee: Appropriations

Date: February 15, 2022

POSITION: Letter of Information

The Maryland Coalition of Families: Maryland Coalition of Families (MCF) helps families who care for a loved one with behavioral health needs. Using personal experience, our staff provide one-to-one peer support and navigation services to family members with a child, youth or adult with a mental health, substance use or gambling issue.

HB 406's goal is to address a pressing problem that has continued to get worse over recent years: the problem of children who are in out-of-home placements being stuck in inappropriate settings - namely hospitals and psychiatric facilities. This is part of a larger problem of a lack of resources for children and youth with intensive mental health needs and/or significant developmental disabilities and/or severe behavior problems.

There has been a strong impetus over the last decade to close residential psychiatric facilities for children and instead serve youth with community-based services, but robust community-based services have failed to materialize. In 2008, 848 children and youth were served in Maryland Residential Treatment Centers; by 2018 that number had dropped to 454. That decade saw the closure of hundreds of psychiatric residential treatment beds in Maryland, and since 2018 one more residential treatment center has closed. **Currently there are just 258 operational Residential Treatment Center beds in Maryland.** At the same time, the number of therapeutic group homes has been slashed. While the desire to serve children in their communities whenever possible is commendable:

- There are still children who need more intensive psychiatric services. These children have not gone away.
- Many services that would help to keep children and adolescents in their community placements, such as 24/7 Mobile Response and Stabilization Services, crisis beds, respite, and high-fidelity wraparound, don't exist in Maryland.

The dramatic decline in the number of psychiatric residential beds has had the consequence of children lingering in inpatient units, because there is nowhere appropriate for them to go on

discharge. Families sometimes refuse to take a child home from an inpatient unit because they feel they cannot care for them in their home, further creating a bottleneck.

This has had a domino effect – children now can sit in emergency departments for days, weeks and sometimes months, waiting for an inpatient bed. Youth with developmental disabilities in addition to mental health needs can be particularly difficult to place in an inpatient unit.

The problem of kids being stuck in medical facilities is larger than just children involved with the Department of Human Services, although these children are especially vulnerable. The entire system is clogged with children and families needing help. This issue has already been addressed by the Children’s Cabinet, which developed an Interagency “Hospital Overstays Plan” in April 2020, which was updated in February 2021. While some of the components of the plan have been implemented, progress has been slow. DHS and MDH must move more urgently to enact the plan.

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