

THE COALITION TO PROTECT MARYLAND'S CHILDREN

Our Mission: To combine and amplify the power of organizations and citizens working together to keep children safe from abuse and neglect. We strive to secure the budgetary and public policy resources to make meaningful and measurable improvements in safety, permanence, and well-being.

Senate Budget and Taxation Committee March 30, 2022

HB 406: OUT OF HOME PLACEMENTS – PLACEMENT IN MEDICAL FACILITY

Support with Amendments

When a child is in the state's custody, we assume a weighty responsibility for the child. Although one obligation is to do no harm, we are failing the children and youth whose trauma behaviors present a serious risk to themselves or others. For weeks and sometimes months, these youth are stuck in psychiatric in-patient units without education, age-appropriate socialization, or even treatment as these units are designed for crisis resolution. Shockingly, others may linger in emergency rooms for weeks and months when no community treatment setting or even an in-patient bed willing and available to accept the child.

We appreciate that HB 406 is shining a light on this troubling issue, the end result of decades of neglect by our state government. When multiple treatment programs closed and hundreds of beds disappeared, no plan was made for replacements. This has had disastrous consequences for the children and youth, leaving the local departments of social services without any option for those youth with high intensity needs. Placement providers have the right to say 'no' and they do.

Were the Maryland Department of Health to open 25 "no reject, no eject" psychiatric crisis respite beds, the overstay crisis would be immediately alleviated, and the children would have a safe and stable environment until a more long-term plan can be effectuated.

Some suggest that the children are stuck because caseworkers aren't doing their jobs. These people will share stories claiming that uncaring local departments "dump" children in the hospital and never look back, never even visiting. This is unfortunate, as maligning the workforce is simply a distraction from very real systemic failings.

HB406 offers a welcome start to addressing the shortage of treatment options, mandating that the Maryland Department of Health and Department of Human Services collaborate to provide sufficient capacity for the children – 'our' children - and we ask for your support.