

House Bill 406
Children in Out-of-Home Placements – Placement in Medical Facilities
House Appropriations Committee
February 15, 2021
Support with Amendments

House Bill 406 was introduced to address the issue of foster youth remaining in hospitals after discharge. Catholic Charities of Baltimore understands this issue and supports efforts to address the root causes and to be part of a solution that will also create accountability for those ultimately responsible.

Inspired by the gospel to love, serve and teach, Catholic Charities provides care and services to improve the lives of Marylanders in need. We are committed to a Maryland where each person has the opportunity to reach his or her God-given potential. We fulfill this commitment as a provider of behavioral health services to children, including many in foster care, through school based behavioral health services, out-patient mental health clinics, a residential diagnostic unit, a residential treatment center and a nonpublic special education school.

Children and youth should be in the least restrictive environment that fits their needs. We agree with the sponsor that children should not be left in hospitals after discharge. However, we believe the solution for this problem involves more parties than just local DSS and workers. This is a system wide issue that expands across the purview of other departments, most notably the Behavioral Health Administration in the Maryland Department of Health.

The issues we are dealing with are not new; children staying in hotels, sleeping at DSS offices, and being stuck in hospitals. The Baltimore Sun has documented all of these issues over recent decades. Most recently the MD Children's Cabinet published the ["Interagency Plan: Developing Resources To Address the Complex Needs of Maryland Youth in Care Prepared By: State of Maryland Children's Cabinet April 2020"](#). (The last public update to the plan was in February 2021.) This strategic plan is strikingly similar to the Interagency Strategic Plan created in 2008 under the prior administration.

The goal of any legislation should be to hold the State's Children's Cabinet and entire child-serving system accountable for implementing these strategies in a timely and robust fashion.

There are healthy discussions and efforts underway to address foster children stuck in hospitals, voluntary placements for children, crisis response systems for children, etc. The biggest mistake that we make is to treat these issues as separate and discrete. There is only one child-serving system, and it is housed across a number of agencies that must be accountable for working together to take care of all of Maryland's children.

The issues that exist are both long-term and short-term. There is an immediate need for youth crisis/treatment beds to alleviate the current stress on the system. There is a longer-term need for evidence-based preventative services to treat the behavioral health needs of Marylanders. The number one driver of entries to child welfare is behavioral health. Adult substance use is the number one driver of young children entering care. Youth and parent mental health issues are the primary driver of teens entering the system. The systems MUST come together. This isn't a political issue – the plan has already been written, multiple times, by consecutive republican and democrat administrations.

With this legislation, an oversight committee should be established that is responsible for urgently overseeing implementation of the above referenced Interagency Plan. The committee should have representatives from the legislature, DHS, MDH, local DSS, MARFY providers, attorneys for the youth, and other stakeholders. This Children's Cabinet should be required to provide the committee with regular progress reports. The youth and adults served by these programs deserve the very best our State can offer.

Thank you for your consideration of our views.

Submitted By: Kevin Keegan, Director of Family Services