

Date: March 31, 2022

Bill number: SB0203

Committee: Judiciary Committee

Bill title: **Children in Need of Assistance – Custody and Guardianship and Review Hearings**

DHS Position: **SUPPORT**

Chairman Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher and Committee Members, I am Denise Conway, Executive Director of the Social Services Administration at the Maryland Department of Human Services and I thank you for the opportunity to share the merits of Senate Bill 203 - Children in Need of Assistance and Guardianship and Review Hearings.

On May 10, 2021, the Children’s Bureau notified the state that it was out of *compliance with Section 475(5)(B) of the Social Security Act* which requires that the status of every child in foster care be reviewed every six months. These hearings are required to determine:

- the safety of the child,
- the continued appropriateness of the current placement,
- compliance with the current plan for the child and family,
- the status of addressing or mitigating the reasons for placement in foster care, and
- a projected date that the child may be returned home safely or placed for adoption or legal guardianship.

In addition, for older youth who are expected to remain in foster care until adulthood, these review hearings are required to identify the opportunities for the youth to engage in activities such as sleepovers with friends, social events, school-sponsored field trips, and scouting that normalize their lives and maintain their health, safety, wellbeing as well as assist in developing valuable life skills.

The proposed amendments will ensure Maryland’s compliance with federal statutes and regulations. Implementing federal mandates is critical for Maryland’s federal funding retention and will more importantly, ensure that we are regularly partnering with children, youth, and families around achieving lasting permanency.

I thank you for your time and consideration and if you have any questions I would be happy to answer them.

