

March 26, 2024

The Honorable Will Smith
Chair, Judicial Proceedings Committee
Miller Senate Office Building, 2 East
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

**RE: TESTIMONY ON HB0214 - Family Law – Adoption of an Adult - POSITION:
FAVORABLE**

Dear Chair Smith and members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee:

The Maryland Department of Human Services (DHS) thanks the Committee for the opportunity to provide written testimony in favor of House Bill 214 (HB0214).

With offices in every one of Maryland's jurisdictions, DHS serves to empower Marylanders to reach their full potential by helping with preventive and supportive services, economic assistance, and meaningful connections to workforce development and career opportunities. The Social Services Administration (SSA) within DHS implements the Child Welfare and Adult Services programs which serve individuals whose lives would be positively impacted by the passage of HB0214. The bill supports the Department's efforts to improve services, and family connections for older youth beyond their time in foster care.

Reversing Maryland's previous trends of older youth aging out of foster care is a priority, with building connections to family and kin, by blood or by choice, a key strategy. Youth who exit care without permanent connections to adults are more likely to struggle in their early adulthood, with 1 out of 5 youth experiencing homelessness, 50% struggling with employment, and over 50% becoming connected to juvenile justice.¹ House Bill 214 would support older youth in finding permanent family connections by allowing those over 18 years old the decision-making authority to consent to their own adoption. Currently, the Department has 95 youth, age 18 or older who have been with the same foster family or kin family for the last 18 months. Given our commitment to reduce how and why youth age out of care, HB0214 will reduce barriers to adult adoption and empower young adults and their families to decide if adoption is right for them.

¹ Fowler PJ, Marcal KE, Zhang J, Day O, Landsverk J. Homelessness and Aging Out of Foster Care: A National Comparison of Child Welfare-Involved Adolescents. *Child Youth Serv Rev*. 2017 Jun;77:27-33. doi: 10.1016/j.childyouth.2017.03.017. Epub 2017 Mar 30. PMID: 29056803; PMCID: PMC5644395.



Youth who emancipate from foster care, even if connected to an adult emotionally, do not have the same rights as a child who is adopted. House Bill 214 will allow a family to choose adoption with less administrative burden, allowing additional benefits for the adoptee, including the ability to receive Social Security benefits of the parent(s) and inheritance through intestate succession laws. Further, in the event of medical emergencies, it is important for adults to have trusted individuals who can help make life or death medical decisions and receive medical records. We must do all we can to empower former foster youth to make choices that respect their life and dignity. This bill will help fortify chosen families to make those medical decisions and protect them from potential harm during times of distress.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide written testimony and recommend a favorable position to the Committee for consideration during your deliberations. We look forward to the decision of the Committee and welcome continued collaboration on HB0214.

If you require additional information, please contact Rachel Sledge, Director of Government Affairs, at rachel.sledge@maryland.gov.

In service,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rafael López', written in a cursive style.

Rafael López
Secretary