



March 26, 2025

## **Senate Bill 833 - Family Law - Treatment Foster Care Homes - Child Care Stipends for Private Providers**

### **House Appropriations Committee**

#### **Position: FAVORABLE**

The Maryland Association of Resources for Families and Youth (MARFY) writes in support of *Senate bill 833 – Department of Human Services - Study on Private Treatment Foster Care Homes*. We are an association of private child caring organizations providing foster care, group homes, and other services through more than 200 programs across Maryland. The members of MARFY represent providers who serve Maryland's most vulnerable children who are in out of home placements due to abuse, neglect or severe mental health, and medical needs. We operate group homes, treatment foster care (TFC) programs and independent living programs, primarily serving the adoptive and foster care population as well as a juvenile services population.

MARFY strongly supports Senate Bill 833, and ask that the House pass the bill as amended by the Senate which mandates that the Department of Human Services (DHS) conduct a study to determine the types of State support, in the form of funding or otherwise, that would be appropriate and beneficial to assist private providers of treatment foster care homes in the provision of services. By December 1, 2025, DHS must report its findings and recommendations to the General Assembly.

The passage of this bill is extremely important to ensure the needs of treatment foster care providers (both public and private) as well as the individuals and families they serve, are met bringing to light the resources they need to excel and thrive. Additionally, our hope is this study will help bring parity to longstanding disparities between private and public TFC families, where only the latter currently qualify for these essential financial supports.

The introduction of this legislation was a priority brought forth by MARFY to help support some of Maryland's most vulnerable citizens. While the new language and study will address additional support services needed for TFC care to thrive, the original intent was to help private TFC families access childcare in a similar manner to public TFC families which are noted as follows:

Maryland's private Treatment Foster Care families are currently ineligible for state-funded child care stipends, which creates two primary issues:

1. **Recruitment and Retention Challenges:** Many potential foster parents are unable to commit to providing care due to the lack of child care assistance. TFC youth typically have higher emotional, behavioral, or medical needs, requiring more attention and



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specialized care. Without access to child care coverage, many foster families struggle to balance employment and caregiving responsibilities, leading to high turnover rates and fewer available placements for vulnerable children.

2. **Lack of Placement Resources:** Due to the shortage of TFC foster families, children requiring specialized care are often placed in less-than-ideal settings such as hospital overstay, isolated motels, or group homes that may not adequately meet their needs. Providing child care stipends to private TFC families would help to alleviate these placement shortages and improve stability for foster youth.

Providing child care stipends to private TFC providers will:

- **Ensure financial equity** by aligning the resources available to private and public foster families.
- **Improve foster care recruitment and retention** by making it financially feasible for more families to serve as TFC caregivers.
- **Reduce unnecessary institutional placements** by increasing the number of available family-based care options.
- **Promote better developmental outcomes** for foster children by ensuring they are placed in stable, nurturing environments.

Original language proposed a reallocating a portion of funds currently used to cover extended hospital stays, emergency motel placements, and other temporary housing solutions for TFC youth. By directing these resources toward child care stipends for private TFC families, Maryland can provide a more cost-effective and humane solution that benefits both foster youth and the families who care for them. Estimates suggest that funding requirements for this program would be well below the costs currently associated with institutional placements and emergency accommodations. Ensuring this bill is passed as amended by the Senate will still help to address these challenges without the financial constraints of the original language.

In conclusion, Senate Bill 833 represents a critical step toward improving Maryland's foster care system by ensuring that all TFC families, regardless of whether they are affiliated with public or private agencies, have access to the support they need.

On behalf of MARFY and the children and families we serve, we respectfully ask the members of this committee to vote in favor of Senate Bill 833.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

**For more information call or email:**

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