

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 budgetary and public policy resources to make meaningful and measurable improvements in safety, permanence, and wellbeing.



SB0755 - Higher Education – Student Financial Assistance – Students in Informal Kinship Care Relationships
Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
February 21, 2025

Position: SUPPORT w/AMENDMENTS

The Coalition to Protect Maryland's Children is a consortium of organizations and individuals formed in 1996 who are concerned about the care of Maryland's most vulnerable children and work together to promote meaningful child welfare reform. CPMC urges a favorable report with amendments on SB0755- Higher Education – Student Financial Assistance – Students in Informal Kinship Care Relationships.¹

SB0770 intends to extend financial assistance for higher education to youth in informal kinship care. However, we have concerns regarding the language used to define eligible students. To ensure the bill includes the appropriate population, we are recommending amendments.

DEFINING INFORMAL KINSHIP CARE: According to **Education Article 7-101**, “informal kinship care” refers to a living arrangement in which a **relative of a child**, who is **not under the care, custody, or guardianship of the local department of social services**, provides for the child due to a **serious family hardship**, which includes:

1. **Death** of a parent or legal guardian
2. **Serious illness** of a parent or legal guardian
3. **Substance abuse** by a parent or legal guardian
4. **Incarceration** of a parent or legal guardian
5. **Abandonment** by a parent or legal guardian
6. **Active military duty** of a parent or legal guardian

With an **affidavit of family hardship**, informal caregivers can enroll the child in their local school district rather than the district where the child's parents reside.

CONCERNS WITH SB755'S LANGUAGE: SB0755 currently states that an individual is eligible for a Guaranteed Access Grant if they: “Participate in an informal kinship care relationship licensed by the Department of Human Services.”

¹ Members of CPMC represented by this written testimony include Catholic Charities of Baltimore, Center for Hope, Child Justice, Citizens Review Board for Children, Court Appointed Special Advocates (MD CASA), Court Appointed Special Advocates (Baltimore County), MD Chapter - American Academy of Pediatrics, Maryland Association of Resources for Families and Youth (MARFY), Maryland Children's Alliance, Maryland Coalition Against Sexual Assault, Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence, and National Association of Social Workers – MD.

However, **the Department of Human Services does not license informal kinship care homes**. These are family-based arrangements made **without** state intervention, meaning this requirement is inaccurate and could exclude the intended population.

Additionally, under Education Article 7-101, a “relative” is defined as an **adult related by blood or marriage within the fifth degree of consanguinity**. However, SB0755 should also recognize **"kin of the heart"** - adults with a **close, familial bond** to the child, even if not related by blood or marriage.

By contrast, **formal kinship care** applies to children in the custody of the state and placed with relatives or “kin of the heart.” These children already qualify for higher education tuition waivers under foster care policies.

RECOMMENDED AMENDMENTS: To ensure SB0755 serves the intended population, we recommend that the bill be amended as follows:

13 (2) AN INDIVIDUAL UNDER PARAGRAPH (1) OF THIS SUBSECTION IS
14 ELIGIBLE FOR A GUARANTEED ACCESS GRANT IF THE INDIVIDUAL:
15 (I) PARTICIPATES IN AN INFORMAL KINSHIP CARE **LIVING**
ARRANGEMENT
 ~~RELATIONSHIP LICENSED BY THE DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN~~
~~SERVICES; AND~~
17 (II) PROVIDES A COPY OF THE AFFIDAVIT OF **FAMILY**
HARDSHIP SUBMITTED TO
18 THE COUNTY BOARD OF **EDUCATION** VERIFYING THE INFORMAL
KINSHIP CARE RELATIONSHIP
19 **THE INFORMAL KINSHIP CARE MAY BE PROVIDED BY AN ADULT**
RELATED TO THE CHILD BY BLOOD OR MARRIAGE WITHIN THE FIFTH
DEGREE OF CONSANGUINITY OR AN ADULT WITH WHOM THE CHILD HAS A
CLOSE FAMILIAL RELATIONSHIP

Youth in informal kinship care **do not** have access to the same resources as children in **Out-of-Home Placement**, despite often facing the same hardships. Their eligibility for college financial assistance should not be determined by the income of the caregivers who stepped up to support them without requiring government intervention. With the proposed amendments, SB755 will ensure that children in informal kinship care have access to financial assistance needed to pursue higher education.

It is for these reasons that the Coalition to Protect Maryland’s Children **urges a favorable report** with our recommended amendments on SB0770 - Higher Education – Student Financial Assistance – Students in Informal Kinship Care Relationships.