

**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 well-being.*



**CPMC**  
COALITION TO PROTECT  
MARYLAND'S CHILDREN

**House Bill 962 – Public Health –  
Pediatric Hospital Overstay Patients  
House Health & Government Operations Committee  
February 26, 2025**

**\*\*SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS\*\***

The Coalition to Protect Maryland's Children (CPMC) is a consortium formed in 1996 of organizations and individuals dedicated to improving the care of Maryland's most vulnerable children. We work collaboratively to promote meaningful child welfare reform. CPMC **urges a favorable report on HB0962<sup>1</sup> with amendments.** This bill seeks to address the dire issue of children and youth remaining on overstay in psychiatric hospitals - some for months; our amendments urge the inclusion of children and youth placed in unlicensed settings.

According to state data, 60% of youth ages 14 to 17 enter foster care due to complex behavioral health needs, including autism and other developmental disabilities, rather than as a result of child maltreatment. The Department of Human Services' 2024 Annual Progress and Services Report correctly identifies the state's inadequate placement continuum as a "placement crisis." But after seven years, does this crisis not reflect an entrenched systemic failure?

Providing care and treatment for youth with complex behavioral health needs may more logically fall under the Maryland Department of Health (MDH). However, like other states, Maryland's child welfare system has been tasked with serving youth with these needs, leading to what one national report labeled "voluntary relinquishments" - parents who bring their children to hospitals indicating an inability to continue providing care.

Along with hospital overstays, local Departments of Social Services have been forced to house children in unapproved settings such as hotels, relying on 1:1 aides for supervision and gift cards for food. This practice became more prevalent beginning in 2018, and by 2023, as many as 235 children were reportedly housed in hotels. With an average stay of 73 days and average cost of \$1,415 per day, the total cost was roughly \$25,936,950. Surely Maryland can do better?

We propose HB0962 be amended to include children in unlicensed placements such as hotels because these children share similarly complex behavioral and developmental needs and are

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<sup>1</sup> Members of CPMC who agree with this position include Center for Hope, Child Justice, Citizens Review Board for Children, Court Appointed Special Advocates (MD CASA), Court Appointed Special Advocates (Baltimore County), Everstand, MD Chapter - American Academy of Pediatrics, Maryland Association of Resources for Families and Youth (MARFY), National Association of Social Workers - MD, and State Council on Child Abuse and Neglect.

often one emergency room visit away from becoming a hospital overstayer. Addressing the needs of hospital overstayers while neglecting those in unlicensed placements risks further reliance on unlicensed settings. The solution must be comprehensive and inclusive of all children and youth.

Our proposed amendments also remove the provision requiring hospitals to make child welfare placement referrals. Hospital staff lack the necessary expertise in making child welfare placements, and such responsibilities should remain with the appropriate agencies.

As written, HB0962 leaves a critical gap in addressing Maryland's long-standing placement crisis. We urge lawmakers to revise the bill to include meaningful solutions that expand and strengthen the placement continuum. All children in state custody deserve stable, supportive care.

After seven years, will we finally commit to real change for these children, or continue to kick the can down the road?

It is for these reasons that the Coalition to Protect Maryland's Children **urges a favorable report with amendments on HB0962.**