

February 19, 2025

Senate Bill 833- Treatment Foster Care Homes – Child Care Stipends for Private Providers

Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

POSITION: SUPPORT

Dear Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of Arc Baltimore's Treatment Foster Care Program we are writing to express our unwavering support for Senate Bill 833, a critical piece of legislation that proposes to review and reallocate a portion of the Department of Human Services' annual budget to be used to provide child care stipends to certain private treatment foster care homes to cover child care expenses.

Since 1949, The Arc Baltimore has been supporting people with developmental disabilities to lead fulfilling lives with a sense of belonging, purpose and meaningful relationships. The Arc has approximately 800 full and part-time employees and provides services at people's homes, places of employment, day centers, and neighborhoods.

The Arc Baltimore, in partnership with the state and local entities, provides children throughout the Greater Baltimore area with treatment foster care services. Our Treatment Foster Care Program provides individualized, intentional, trauma-informed clinical services for children and families in our community, facilitating healthy development, lasting relationships, and lifelong success.

As a provider working directly with foster families, we have witnessed firsthand the struggles they endure to provide care for the children they welcome into their homes. According to the Annie E. Casey Foundation Kids Count Data Center, in 2021 there were 3,635 children in foster care in Maryland. Choosing to become a foster parent and bringing a youth into your home can bring many joys and many challenges. Among those

challenges, is the need to support childcare costs. Currently, many Maryland foster parents struggle to understand the current reimbursement system and information can be conflicting. Additionally, the current system can be delayed in issuing payments, which causes the family to either take on the cost or risk losing their child's spot in the childcare program.

Children in the foster system have all experienced some degree of trauma and need access to enhanced medical, developmental, and behavioral support childcare programs. These programs are often not available or affordable for foster parents receiving public funding.

This legislation would benefit foster children, youth, and society at large. The opportunity to enroll these children in research-based therapeutic early learning enables parents to work; helping to address Maryland's higher-than-the-national-average reduction in prime-aged women in the workforce. But more than that, it gives these families peace of mind as their children thrive. Early learning and preschool have a considerable impact on the health and well-being of families. High-quality programs generate long-term impacts to prevent or reverse the damaging effects of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), improve access to nutrition, and enhance a child's cognitive and physical development.

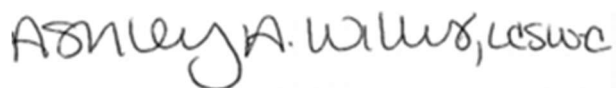
Childcare is often a significant hurdle, with many families facing financial barriers that limit their ability to access high quality services. This legislation is a beacon of hope for foster care families who tirelessly work to provide safe, loving homes for children in need. By offering subsidies and scholarships for childcare, Senate Bill 833 addresses a significant financial challenge, allowing foster families to allocate resources more effectively to meet the comprehensive needs of foster children.

Senate Bill 833 represents a commitment to supporting foster families by addressing two of the most pressing challenges they face: financial strain and access to quality childcare. By reallocating funds to provide childcare assistance, this legislation demonstrates a recognition of the value and importance of foster families in our community. It acknowledges the sacrifices they make and offers tangible support to ensure they can continue their vital work without compromising on the quality of care or their financial well-being. Moreover, access to child care is essential for foster parents, many of whom balance employment with their caregiving responsibilities. SB 833 will provide much

needed support, ensuring that foster families do not have to choose between financial stability and providing quality care for their children.

To conclude, we urge you to support Senate Bill 833 to support foster care families and children of Maryland. This bill is a step toward a more compassionate, supportive system that recognizes the needs of foster families and provides the necessary resources to meet those needs. Your support for this legislation is a vote for the stability, well-being, and future of our foster children and their caregivers.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ashley A. Willis, LCSW-C". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a light gray rectangular background.

Ashley A. Willis, LCSW-C
Director of Foster Care & Clinical Services
The Arc Baltimore