



DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

Wes Moore, Governor · Aruna Miller, Lt. Governor · Rafael López, Secretary

January 14, 2025

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

**RE: TESTIMONY ON SB 191 - FAMILY LAW - CHILDREN IN NEED OF ASSISTANCE -
UNLICENSED SETTINGS - POSITION: FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS**

Dear Chair Smith and Members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee:

The Maryland Department of Human Services (DHS) thanks the Committee for its consideration and respectfully requests a favorable report with our amendment for Senate Bill 191 (SB 191).

With offices in every one of Maryland's jurisdictions, we empower Marylanders to reach their full potential by providing preventative and supportive services, economic assistance, and meaningful connections to employment development and career opportunities. The Social Services Administration (SSA) within DHS leads the child welfare services program serving Maryland youth experiencing an out-of-home placement whose best interests are served by passing SB 191.

SB 191 addresses the critical issue of a small percentage of youth experiencing out-of-home care who are temporarily staying in unlicensed settings, such as hotels, motels, homeless shelters, or our Local Departments of Social Services (LDSS) offices. Except in very limited circumstances, after enhanced administrative efforts and with careful oversight, unlicensed settings are not in the best interest of youth. SB 191 establishes that stays in unlicensed settings are not appropriate for youth experiencing out-of-home care, except in limited circumstances and only after the agency makes enhanced efforts to reunify the youth with their family, place the youth with kin, or identify an otherwise appropriate placement.

SB 191 builds upon our successful partnership with the Maryland General Assembly and their legislative successes improving appropriate placements for youth who require out-of-home care, including passing Senate Bill 708 (2024) prioritizing

kinship care. In 2024, we promulgated changes to COMAR 07.02.09 to improve kinship caregiver licensing and support. In partnership with the Maryland General Assembly, we also promulgated COMAR 14.31.04 to appropriately compensate and incentivize Residential Child Care (RCC) providers to offer services that meet the needs of Maryland's youth experiencing out-of-home care. The new rates expand the array of appropriate placements for youth in Maryland.

In rare situations in which a youth's complex needs require a specific approach or an uncommon service we may need time to identify and secure a licensed placement. Therefore, SB 191 limits stays in an unlicensed setting to a maximum of 10 days. The bill limits stays in unlicensed settings by restricting the use of state funds for unlicensed stays beyond 10 days unless the agency establishes they have made specific efforts and the DHS Secretary provides express permission.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide favorable testimony with amendments to the Committee for consideration during your deliberations. You will find our proposed amendment on the following page. We look forward to your partnership in helping us make sure to leave no one behind through your support of Senate Bill 191.

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 over a horizontal line.

Rafael López
Secretary

Proposed Amendment

Amendment No. 1

On page 3, strike lines 27-28 in its entirety; reletter and number lines 25 and 26 as needed.