



Kennedy Krieger Institute

DATE: February 19, 2025 **COMMITTEE:** Senate – Judicial Committee
BILL NO: SENATE BILL 833
BILL TITLE: Foster Care Families Child Care Assistance Program and Fund - Establishment
POSITION: Support

Kennedy Krieger Institute supports Senate Bill 883 - Foster Care Families Child Care Assistance Program and Fund – Establishment.

Bill Summary:

Senate Bill 833 establishes the Foster Care Families Child Care Assistance Program within the State Department of Education to provide childcare assistance through subsidies and scholarships to eligible foster care families.

Background:

On behalf of The Kennedy Krieger Institute, we are writing to express our unwavering support for Senate Bill 833, a critical piece of legislation that proposes the establishment of Foster Care Families Childcare Assistance Program and Fund within the State Department of Education.

Kennedy Krieger Institute Therapeutic Foster Care is a community program which began in 1986 serving children in the foster care who have experience trauma and are diagnosed with emotional/behavioral health conditions, developmental disabilities, and/or medically complex conditions. Our program was one of the first in Maryland. It is providers an alternative to placement or step down from congregate care facilities. As an example, since the beginning of fiscal year 2024 we have place five children from medical hospitals. Our program’s primary focused on treatment and permanency of children. The means children reunifying with their families or kin and when recommended and necessary adoption typically by treatment foster care foster parents. **In fiscal year so far of the nine children discharged from our program four have been reunified with their family, three have been adopted by our foster parents and two have returned to our program after discharge. 5 Hospitals**

*Treatment foster care is a family-based service delivery approach providing individualized treatment for children youth and their families. Treatment is delivered through an integrated constellation of services with **key interventions and supports provided by treatment parent**, who are trained, supervised, and supported by qualified program staff.”* (Family Focused Treatment Association (FFTA) Standards)

Foster parents are the key to our effectiveness of treatment foster care. Without treatment parents (foster parents) our program could not exist. In my 40 years working in foster care, as both an administrator and therapy, I have had the privilege and have been humbled by the work of our foster parents. Foster parenting an emerging profession and a calling. Over the years I have shared in the experiences of the near miracles performed by foster because of their skill and dedication. A few examples have been: foster parents helping children walk, talk, feed themselves when professionals predicted this would never happen; foster parents supporting children surviving from cancer; foster parent supporting children living well beyond their life expectancy and when they have died, due to their medical conditions, they have died with dignity and respect surrounded by family; foster parents supporting reunification and in the process becoming members of the child’s extended family continuing to support the child as well as their family; and foster parents making permanent homes for the children with the most complex needs; foster parents supporting children to perform well above expectations in school, through graduation and living independently as the continue to support them through transition to adulthood; and youth becoming successful young adults, raise families and break the cycle

of poverty and trauma due to the support of foster parents. These are the rewards of foster parenting. Foster parents who not only open their hearts and homes but provide skill-based interventions addressing trauma, behavior, and special needs of foster children, transport and attend multiple appointments with multiple specialists, educational meetings, participate as members of the treatment, attending team meetings, support visitation with birth family, court hearings, and multiple trainings necessary to maintain their license.

Over the last 30 years I have seen less individuals looking to become foster parents as the needs of the child in foster care have become more challenging and complex.

A recent survey conducted by the University of Maryland School of Social Work, the Maryland Resource Parent Association (MRPA) and the Maryland Association of Resources for Families and Youth (MARFY) of over two hundred foster parents in Maryland identified the need for greater access to mental health and educational services, increase access to respite, increase reimbursement, increase participation in court hearings, better communication with department of social service staff, increase support in work with birth families and adoption services as well as availability child care. Childcare was seen as the most needed support. This included affordable childcare which would accept and address the special needs of children in foster care. Currently, treatment foster care parents are not eligible for childcare subsidies. Treatment foster care program rates do not include childcare costs, so our foster parents much pay out of pocket the cost of childcare. Lack of childcare is a barrier for placement of children in our program. So too often children must remain in hospitals or residential placements because of the lack of childcare. The lack of childcare is also a barrier in the retention and recruitment of foster parent as families simply cannot afford to take on the financial responsibility for caring for a special needs child even when the family is willing and able. Investment in childcare is not only cost-effective investment but also in investment in the wellbeing of special needs of children in foster care.

This legislation is a beacon of hope for foster care families who tirelessly work 24 hours a day 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 establishing a dedicated fund 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 childcare 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.

Kennedy Krieger Institute requests a favorable report on Senate Bill 833.

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