

Good afternoon all and thank you Delegate Addison for inviting me to participate in this very important historical session. My name is Janice Harris. I am a 62 yrs old disabled veteran who is the proud mother to 4 adult children and the doting grandmother to 11 grandchildren. I am also a de facto parent to one of those grandchildren. His name is Ian. As a de facto parent I raised Ian since he was 13 months old. Ian is now 10 years old. During those first 8 yrs I have imprinted an unbreakable, loving maternal bond with Ian as I worked tirelessly to stabilize, educate, nurture, support, and advocate for him and all of his special needs.

In September 2023 the Circuit Court for Baltimore City Family Division unjustly reduced my access to Ian to 2 hours every other weekend, at my cost! And for context, as a grandparent, in order for Ian and I to see each other, I must pay \$160 every two weeks. This is a travesty and an absolute miscarriage of justice! This is not in the best interest of Ian, a special needs child who was yanked from a loving, stable home with his Nana and placed in a well-documented abusive and neglectful environment with his father. Talk about insult to injury.

On the one hand as a de facto parent I have “ Legal standing“ but the culture and with the lack of legislation, I am seen and treated as “just the grandparent“ -without any rights or protections under the law.

Grandparents are so much more than occasional sleepovers specifically with the growing population of grandparents who are also full time caregivers. The opioid crisis, drug overdoses, deaths, and mass incarcerations have created a growing population of grandparents and even great grandparents who bear the responsibility of raising grandchildren and great grandchildren full time. This population of grandparents also needs legislation, support and respite services.

In closing, It is true that it takes a village to raise a child. Grandparents are a vital part of the richness of the beautiful, and complex, and loving core-memories and lifelong experiences of a child. As my beautiful Ian continues to grow, it is true that he will be unpacking all of these childhood traumas perhaps for a lifetime. Yet one undeniable fact is that he will also have his lifetime to savor and cherish the beautiful, warm and loving memories of his life with me, his Nana, his de facto parent who is also his maternal grandmother. Thank you all for your time and much consideration in passing House Bill 721 in support of grandparents in Maryland.