

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 wellbeing.



HB0837 – Task Force to Study Forced Infant Separation from Incarcerated Individuals House Judiciary Committee February 18, 2025

Position: SUPPORT

The Coalition to Protect Maryland's Children is a consortium of organizations and individuals formed in 1996 who are concerned about the care of Maryland's most vulnerable children and work together to promote meaningful child welfare reform. CPMC urges a favorable report on HB0837- Task Force to Study Forced Infant Separation from Incarcerated Individuals.¹

For many years, advocates have been trying to gain the attention of legislators about the state's need to invest in building more supports for parents inside local and state incarceration facilities. The majority of returning citizens will return to their communities and homes after serving their time, and many are parents who will seek to reconnect and regain meaningful relationships with the children they have left behind. Advocates in the reproductive justice space have been also raising concerns about the outcomes of maternal and infant health, bringing to light the issue of forced infant separation.

HB0837 is presented as commonsense legislation to explore and determine best practices for Maryland regarding methods to reduce forced infant separation in the State and facilitate bonds between postpartum incarcerated individuals and their children. Our coalition believes that not only does this task force hold promise for improving maternal and health outcomes but preventing child maltreatment in allowing the bonds between maternal parent and infant to strengthen and grow through the life span of the child. We are pleased that bill sponsor is seeking amendments to add to the task force member list at least one children's attorney and a social worker specializing in early childhood. Including these professionals will help inform efforts surrounding prevention of child maltreatment as well as legal scholarship and brain science which back stopping forced infant separation to further the child's best interests. Such professional will fortify child safety and wellbeing as goals of the task force, countering implicit bias or discrimination surrounding the challenges experienced by systems-involved parents with infants.

It is for these reasons that the Coalition to Protect Maryland's Children **urges a favorable report** on HB0837- Task Force to Study Forced Infant Separation from Incarcerated Individuals.

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

