

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.



**HB1205 – Family Law - Prospective Foster Care Parents and
Out-of-Home Placements
February 20, 2025**

Position: Information Only

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.

We appreciate the good intent of HB1205 – full disclosure to foster parents with all known information about the child prior to placement – **and are hopeful learning that the requirement already exists in regulation and practice is welcome news.** As we hope we might agree, not all best practices need to be legislated, especially when already embedded in existing regulations.¹

COMAR Sec. 07.02.25.07-1. Rights of a Foster Parent mandates that, “A. At the initial placement, at any time during the placement of a child in foster care, and as soon as practicable after new information becomes available, the foster parent has the right to receive full information from the caseworker on the physical, social, emotional, educational, and mental history of a child which would possibly affect the care provided by a foster parent except for information about the family members that may be privileged or confidential.”

When children are referred by the Local Departments to Child Placement Agencies, **COMAR Sec. 07.05.02.15.**, Agency Services to the Child Before Placement in Foster Care, requires the following (i) Medical passport and medical history or other medical information; (ii) Educational history; (iii) Psychosocial history; and (iv) When appropriate, psychiatric or psychological evaluation. In case of emergency placement, the information must be provided within 20 days.

With respect to best casework practice, full disclosure to potential foster parents is critical for maximizing the likelihood of a good match, one able to meet the needs of that particular child or youth. Failing to disclose important information about a child does everyone a disservice, most of all the child.

¹ Members of CPMC represented by this written testimony include Catholic Charities of Baltimore, Center for Hope, Child Justice, Court Appointed Special Advocates (MD CASA), Court Appointed Special Advocates (Baltimore County), Maryland Children's Alliance, Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence, and National Association of Social Workers – MD.

Given that over 60% of youth ages 14 to 17 enter foster care not due to maltreatment, but to meet behavioral health needs – including developmental disabilities – we know these young people have complex needs. The challenge? The Local Department can only share the information that's been shared with the Department. When a child enters foster care on an emergency basis, little information may be known and current police investigations, for example, may not be able to be shared.

With respect to the number of children who can be placed in a foster home, current regulations allow up to six children. Reducing the number would be regrettable, especially as we sometimes have large sibling groups.

In short, the intent of HB1205 - Family Law - Prospective Foster Care Parents and Out-of-Home Placements to assure the release of non-confidential information about the child is already well embedded in regulation and in practice. In spite of its best efforts, regrettably the Local Department may not be the recipient of all information about a child, especially when placement is made emergently.