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PSYCHOLOGICAL
ASSOCIATION

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House Appropriations Committee
120 Taylor House Office Building
121 Taylor House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: House Bill 1181 – Family Law – Children in Out-of-Home Placement – Voluntary Placement Agreements

Position: Support

Dear Chair Barnes, Vice Chair Kaiser, and Members of the Committee:

The Maryland Psychological Association (MPA), which represents over 1,000 doctoral-level psychologists across the state, writes in SUPPORT of House Bill 1181 – Family Law – Children in Out-of-Home Placement – Voluntary Placement Agreements. This legislation clarifies and strengthens the framework governing voluntary placement agreements, which occur when a parent or guardian consents to temporary out-of-home placement to address safety, medical, behavioral, or caregiving challenges.

House Bill 1181 enhances oversight and data collection related to voluntary out-of-home placements, which can help reduce delays in connecting children to appropriate care. By requiring joint reporting from the Department of Human Services and the Department of Health, and by refining the duties of the Workgroup on Children in Unlicensed Settings and Pediatric Hospital Overstays, the bill promotes interagency coordination and helps identify systemic bottlenecks that delay timely placement. Earlier identification of barriers can support more efficient processes and allow children with complex needs to access safe and clinically appropriate settings more quickly.

The bill includes several important safeguards. It specifies that a local department may not seek legal guardianship (in addition to custody) of a child under a voluntary placement agreement when the purpose of placement is to obtain treatment or care. It clarifies that residential placement may be included when extended care is necessary and that caregivers are not required to exhaust all home- and community-based services before a child becomes eligible for out-of-home placement. Importantly, it affirms that parents retain all legal and educational decision-making rights unless otherwise agreed upon. Additionally, the bill requires the Administration and the Child Support Enforcement Administration to collaborate in establishing uniform criteria for waiving or reducing child support obligations for low-income families who enter into voluntary placement agreements. This provision helps reduce financial barriers that might otherwise discourage families from seeking needed care. Together, these protections preserve family rights, reduce procedural and financial obstacles, and ensure that children can access necessary services in a timely and clinically appropriate manner.

Children entering voluntary placement agreements often do so because of significant behavioral health, developmental, or trauma-related needs. Ensuring timely, appropriate placement and coordinated oversight helps prevent worsening symptoms and crises, unnecessary hospital stays, and further system involvement. House Bill 1181 represents a meaningful step toward a more responsive and clinically informed child welfare system.

Thank you for considering our comments on HB 1181. If we can provide any additional information or be of any assistance, please do not hesitate to contact the Chair of MPA's Legislative Committee, Dr. Stephanie Olarte, at mpalegislativcommittee@gmail.com.

Respectfully submitted,

Stephanie Wolf, JD, Ph.D.
Stephanie Wolf, JD, Ph.D.
President

Stephanie Olarte, Ph.D.
Stephanie Olarte, Ph.D.
Chair, MPA Legislative Committee

cc: Barbara Brocato & Dan Shattuck, MPA Government Affairs