



MARYLAND
CATHOLIC
CONFERENCE

March 3, 2026

House Bill 1181

**Family Law - Children in Out-of-Home Placement - Voluntary Placement
Agreements**

House Appropriations and Health Committee

Position: Favorable

The Maryland Catholic Conference (MCC) is the public policy representative of the three (arch)dioceses serving Maryland, which together encompass over one million Marylanders. Statewide, their parishes, schools, hospitals, and numerous charities combine to form our state's second largest social service provider network, behind only our state government.

House Bill 1181 alters provisions relating to children who are placed in an out-of-home placement by a local department of social services under a voluntary placement agreement; altering the duties of the Workgroup on Children in Unlicensed Settings and Pediatric Hospital Overstays; and requiring the Department of Human Services and the Maryland Department of Health to jointly submit a certain report concerning children who are placed in an out-of-home placement under a voluntary placement agreement.

If a local department receives a request for a voluntary placement agreement, it must act promptly. Within five business days of receiving the request, the department is required to schedule an assessment meeting with the child's family and the child's treating provider. Within five business days after that assessment meeting, the department must issue a written eligibility determination to both the child's family and the referring provider. If the local department fails to meet these timelines, it must report the delay to the Administration. That report must include the reasons for the delay and the corrective actions taken to address it. In addition, in consultation with the Maryland Department of Health, annual training must be provided to staff who administer voluntary placement requests for children with developmental disabilities or mental illnesses. This training must cover timeline and procedural compliance, trauma-informed family engagement, and effective interagency coordination.

Voluntary placement agreements can help ensure that children are placed with appropriate and trusted caregivers rather than remaining in hospitals or being placed with individuals who have not passed standard criminal background checks. Strong oversight is critical. A recent audit

found that the Social Services Administration (SSA) did not consistently ensure that foster children were placed in settings authorized by state law. Although short-term emergency placements may sometimes require temporary hotel stays, some children were housed in hotels for months—and in certain cases, for up to two years. Many of these children had significant behavioral or medical needs requiring specialized foster care placements. Yet some were supervised by one-on-one vendors who were not licensed providers, raising serious concerns about whether they were receiving appropriate care, services, and oversight.¹

Every child deserves more than temporary shelter; each child deserves stability, safety, and the opportunity to thrive. These reforms strengthen accountability and promote a child welfare system that prioritizes safe, stable, and properly supervised environments. As Pope Leo XIV has urged, we must “find ways to work together in greater harmony so that children receive care that is well balanced, taking into consideration their physical, psychological and spiritual welfare.”² This legislation moves Maryland closer to that goal by placing the dignity, safety, and well-being of children at the center of policy decisions.

For these reasons, the Maryland Catholic Conference asks for a favorable report on **HB 1181**.

Thank you for your consideration.

¹ <https://marylandmatters.org/2025/09/17/state-may-have-put-children-in-homes-where-registered-sex-offenders-lived/?emci=37fe0730-9594-f011-b484-6045bdeb7413&emdi=230d9c40-a294-f011-b484-6045bdeb7413&ceid=554789>

² <https://www.usccb.org/news/2026/pope-warns-little-progress-has-been-made-protect-children-worldwide>