



MARYLAND
CATHOLIC
CONFERENCE

March 9, 2026

House Joint Resolution 4
Social Services Administration - Accountability - Protecting Maryland's Most
Vulnerable
House Rules and Executive Nominations 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 Joint Resolution 4 affirms Maryland's commitment to the physical, mental, and emotional well-being of children in guardianship homes and any child under the care of the Social Services Administration in the Department of Human Services; and imploring the Social Services Administration to strictly comply with State law and regulations to protect children in guardianship homes from abuse and neglect, ensure facilities are properly certified, and implement certain audit recommendations to ensure the health and safety of children in guardianship homes.

Importantly, this resolution is intended to complement—not replace—legislative reforms introduced this session. While legislation can establish new statutory requirements and oversight mechanisms, a joint resolution serves a critical role by formally expressing the General Assembly's expectations for immediate compliance with existing laws and by urging executive agencies to implement needed reforms without delay. In other words, even as new legislation is considered, this resolution underscores that many protections for children already exist in law and must be fully enforced now.

The urgency of these reforms is clear. On September 22, a child under the supervision of the Maryland Department of Human Services was found deceased at the Residence Inn by Marriott Baltimore at The Johns Hopkins Medical Campus.¹ Her name was Kenaiyah Ward. Her death followed the release of a troubling audit of the Social Services Administration within DHS that revealed longstanding systemic failures. Among the findings were failures to ensure required

¹ <https://www.baltimoresun.com/2025/10/02/mike-griffith-proposes-kanaiyahs-law/>

background checks for individuals interacting with children, the absence of a consistent process to reconcile providers against the Sex Offender Registry, and an overreliance on hotel placements and unlicensed providers.²

The audit also found that SSA did not consistently ensure that foster children were placed in settings authorized by state law. While short-term emergency placements may occasionally require temporary hotel stays, some children were housed in hotels for months—and in certain cases, up to two years. Many of these children had 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, or oversight.

Financial mismanagement further strains the system and reduces resources available for vulnerable children. The audit documented nearly \$700,000 in federal penalties for failing to meet foster care service requirements, a loss of almost \$23 million due to failures in eligibility redetermination, nearly \$5 million in uncollected provider overpayments, and payments to a state university for child welfare services without proper documentation or verification.³ Maryland invests approximately \$360 million annually in foster care services. With approximately 24,000 children served statewide and roughly 12,500 participating providers and parents, strong oversight is essential to ensure these resources are used effectively and responsibly.

While numerous bills have been introduced this session to strengthen oversight and accountability within SSA, House Joint Resolution 4 reinforces a fundamental principle: the State must fully enforce the protections that already exist. The resolution emphasizes that no child should ever be placed in a home with adults convicted of disqualifying crimes and that the State must uphold all laws governing custodial guardianship and child welfare placements.

Every child deserves more than temporary shelter. Each child deserves stability, safety, and the opportunity to thrive. By reinforcing compliance with existing law while broader reforms move through the legislative process, this resolution promotes greater accountability and strengthens 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.”⁴ This resolution, alongside legislative efforts, 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 **HJ 4**.

Thank you for your consideration.

² <https://www.baltimoresun.com/2025/10/02/mike-griffith-proposes-kanaiyahs-law/>

³ <https://marylandmatters.org/2025/05/06/a-convicted-criminal-worked-with-children-at-maryland-facility-audit-finds/>

⁴ <https://www.usccb.org/news/2026/pope-warns-little-progress-has-been-made-protect-children-worldwide>