DATE: February 26, 2026 COMMITTEE: Senate Judicial Proceedings
BILL NO: Senate Bill 658
BILL TITLE: Department of Human Services - Benefits for Children in Custody - Alterations
POSITION: Support

Kennedy Krieger supports Senate Bill 658 - Department of Human Services - Benefits for Children in Custody – Alterations.

Bill Summary:
This bill alters provisions relating to the responsibilities of the Department of Human Services as representative and fiduciary for certain children in their custody. Disability and survivor benefits would be safeguarded for use on current or future unmet needs.

Background:
Kennedy Krieger Institute is dedicated to improving the lives of children and young adults with developmental, behavioral, cognitive and physical challenges. Kennedy Krieger's services include inpatient, outpatient, school-based and community-based programs.

Since 1986, Kennedy Krieger's Therapeutic Foster Care (TFC) program has provided a continuum of services for children with specialized needs who require temporary or permanent out-of-home placements. Kennedy Krieger is uniquely equipped to provide these services, drawing on nearly 90 years of experience helping children who have experienced trauma and who have emotional/behavioral challenges, developmental disabilities, or medically complex conditions. Our interdisciplinary teams are experts in diagnosis, evaluation, treatment, and research across a wide range of cognitive, physical, and emotional needs.

Our Therapeutic Foster Care Program offers domestic foster care and pre-adoption services, primarily funded through the Maryland Department of Human Services (DHS).

Rationale:
Under federal law, some foster youth are eligible for federal benefits under the Social Security Administration, including Supplemental Security Income benefits, survivor benefits, and disability benefits. Many states, including Maryland, apply the monthly benefits to provision of care to the foster youth. This bill ensures that federal benefits belonging to an eligible foster youth are protected and not used to offset the State's financial obligations for their care.

A young person transitioning out of foster care faces significant challenges in preparing to live independently. Without the safety net of permanent family support, they must secure housing, transportation, employment, and necessities on their own. Setting aside a portion of their benefits in a dedicated savings account can provide meaningful stability and a financial cushion as they enter adulthood.

For a child with disabilities, the need for financial security is even greater. Additional expenses often accumulate, including adaptive equipment, ongoing therapy and medical services, specialized transportation, assistive technology, and other disability-related supports. While programs such as Medicaid provide important coverage, they do not always meet every need. Savings can help bridge those gaps, ensuring continuity of care, greater independence, and an improved quality of life.

Kennedy Krieger requests a favorable report on Senate Bill 658.

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