


My name is Laura Goldstein, and I am writing in **strong support of HB1272 as both a licensed marriage and family therapist and a foster parent in Montgomery County**. I became a foster parent because a child in my neighborhood needed a safe placement and I already had a trusting relationship with them. Even so, I had to go through a six-month approval process before I could officially become a resource. In the meantime, the child was placed in alternative homes, creating additional disruption and trauma. While many adults would be willing to provide a safe placement for children they already care about, few are able to persist through these barriers. As a result, valuable **placement opportunities are lost in a system that is already critically short of foster homes**.

HB1272 addresses this severe systemic challenge. Expanding the definition of kinship caregivers to include trusted adults identified by the child recognizes that many children have meaningful relationships with supportive adults outside traditional family structures. This approach not only preserves important sources of stability, which research has **linked to improved emotional and behavioral outcomes** compared with non-relative foster care, but also **strengthens trust with biological families, increasing the likelihood of successful rehabilitation and reunification**. At the same time, expanding the pool of caregivers helps **relieve systemic strain**; social workers are often tasked with finding placements in an environment with too few homes, while foster parents are asked to stretch beyond their capacity. This chronic pressure contributes to burnout and turnover among both social workers and foster families, losses the system cannot afford amid an ongoing shortage of resource homes. Research shows kinship placements are often associated with **greater placement stability and fewer behavioral problems over time**. (pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov; pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov).

HB1272 would also help ensure that children's voices are meaningfully heard. Including children's perspectives aligns with **trauma-informed care principles**, which emphasize safety, agency, and control. Research consistently shows that children in foster care want their views to be heard and considered. A 2022 meta-synthesis found that meaningful participation strengthens relationships with caregivers and **ensures child welfare decisions better meet children's needs** (pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov). Allowing children to share their feelings about potential caregivers, while still centering safety, helps **restore autonomy and dignity during a time when much of their life feels out of their control**.

As both a clinician and a foster parent, I believe HB1272 represents a thoughtful, trauma-informed, and practical step toward improving outcomes for children in Maryland's child welfare system. By elevating children's voices, honoring meaningful relationships, and expanding the pool of safe, supportive kinship caregivers, this legislation supports both the emotional well-being of children and the sustainability of the foster care system. **I respectfully urge your support for HB1272**.

Sincerely, 

Laura Goldstein, LCMFT (LCM625)

Owner, Executive Director of Montgomery County Counseling Center