

THE COALITION TO PROTECT MARYLAND'S CHILDREN

Our Mission: To combine and amplify the power of organizations and citizens working together to keep children safe from abuse and neglect. We strive to secure budgetary and public policy resources to make meaningful and measurable improvements in safety, permanence, and wellbeing.



HB0658 - Department of Human Services - Benefits for Children in Custody - Alterations
Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
February 26, 2026

Position: SUPPORT

The Coalition to Protect Maryland's Children is a consortium of organizations and individuals formed in 1992 who are concerned about the care of Maryland's most vulnerable children and work together to educate and promote meaningful child welfare reform. **CPMC urges a favorable report on HB0658 - Department of Human Services - Benefits for Children in Custody – Alterations.**

As many of our coalition members have dedicated their careers to safeguarding the rights of children, we are familiar with the growing concern of how best to safeguard all eligible federal benefits for foster care children in Maryland's system. Although our state was the first one in 2018 to establish protections for foster youths' federal benefits, our current law does not fully protect all foster youth benefits, and instead only requires the conservation of a percentage of the benefits starting at age 14.

SB 658 will ensure that no federal benefits belonging to eligible foster youth are used to offset the state's obligations to pay for their care and are instead safeguarded for each beneficiary's current or future unmet needs. The bill would also make other important changes related to screening and application for these benefits and the conservation and/or use of the funds to meet the beneficiary's unmet needs, among other things. If enacted, the bill would convey a clear message that the practice of taking foster youth's benefits in any amount is antithetical to the best interests of these children.

Ensuring that foster youth leave Maryland's care with the resources intended for them would beneficially impact their transition to adulthood and set them up for success. We look forward to the passage of this legislation and its forthcoming implementation. It is for these reasons that the Coalition to Protect Maryland's Children **urges a favorable report on HB0658 - Department of Human Services - Benefits for Children in Custody – Alterations.**¹

¹ Members of CPMC represented by this written testimony include – the American Academy of Pediatrics - Maryland Chapter, Child Justice, Center for Hope, Citizen's Review Board for Children, Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA - Baltimore County), The Family Tree, Maryland Association of Resources for Families and Youth (MARFY), Maryland Coalition Against Sexual Assault, Maryland Legal Aid, Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence, National Association of Social Workers – MD (NASW), the State Council on Child Abuse & Neglect (SCCAN), and individual members of the coalition.