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POSITION ON PROPOSED LEGISLATION

BILL: House Bill 1305 - State Child Welfare System - Reporting

FROM: Maryland Office of the Public Defender

POSITION: Favorable

DATE: 4/2/26

The Maryland Office of the Public Defender (OPD) respectfully requests that the Committee issue a **favorable report** on House Bill 1305, Denial or Interference with Visitation Rights. House Bill 1305 strengthens protections for parents and children by ensuring that court-ordered visitation is meaningfully restored when it is unjustifiably denied or interfered with.

This testimony is provided by OPD's Parental Defense Division (PDD). PDD represents parents from all 24 counties in Maryland who are involved in the various stages of Child In Need of Assistance (CINA) and Termination of Parental Rights (TPR) cases. Our multidisciplinary legal team, including dedicated attorneys, licensed social workers, and parent advocates with lived-experience in the DSS system, ensures that families receive high quality legal representation.

Decades of research show that youth who spend time in foster care often experience significantly worse life outcomes than their peers across nearly every major measure of adult stability, including housing, education, employment, and involvement with the criminal legal system. The most widely cited longitudinal research on this issue, the Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth conducted by Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago, followed young people as they transitioned from foster care into adulthood.¹

By ages 23 and 24, nearly 40 percent of former foster youth in the study reported experiencing homelessness or housing instability after leaving care. Many reported periods of couch-surfing, staying in shelters, or lacking stable housing altogether.² The same body of research also found substantial involvement with the criminal legal system. By age 21, nearly 30 percent of young men who had been in foster care reported having been incarcerated.

¹ Mark E. Courtney et al., Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth, Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago (2011) (available at <https://www.chapinhall.org/wp-content/uploads/Midwest-Eval-Outcomes-at-Age-26.pdf>).

² *Id.*, at 10-12 (2011).

Educational outcomes are similarly troubling. While most children in the general population graduate from high school and many pursue higher education, young people who have experienced foster care face significant barriers to educational attainment. Only a small percentage ultimately earn a college degree.³

For policymakers to effectively improve the foster care system, they must have access to clear and reliable information about the outcomes experienced by young people who interact with that system. However, comprehensive public reporting on these outcomes is often limited or inconsistent. Without accurate data on issues such as housing stability, educational attainment, employment, and justice system involvement, it is difficult to determine whether current policies are working or where reforms are needed.

House Bill 1305 represents an important step toward addressing this information gap. By requiring improved data collection and reporting regarding outcomes for youth involved in Maryland's foster care system, the legislation will provide policymakers, advocates, and the public with a clearer understanding of how children in care are faring.

The State assumes the profound responsibility of raising children through the foster care system. It must also ensure transparency and accountability regarding the outcomes those children experience. Collecting and reporting meaningful data will allow Maryland to identify gaps, target resources more effectively, and implement evidence-based reforms that improve the lives of vulnerable children.

For these reasons, the Maryland Office of the Public Defender respectfully urges this Committee to issue a favorable report on House Bill 1305.

Submitted by: Maryland Office of the Public Defender

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³ *Id.*, at page 20.