



THE SENATE OF MARYLAND  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Sponsor Testimony

SB 319: Family Law - Child Support - Assignment of Rights

TO: Chair Smith, Vice-Chair Waldstreicher, and Members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee,

I appreciate the opportunity to present testimony in support of Senate Bill 319 for your consideration, which allows the Department of Human Services to abandon the harmful practice of collecting state-owed child support payments from parents whose children are in foster care – except in rare circumstances where such collections would be appropriate. Similar to other legislation discussed before this committee, this bill's language was taken from DHS's Omnibus Child Support Reform Bill last year, giving it the tacit support of the Department and the family law advocates.

Many parents whose children are placed in foster care are already struggling. They often have trouble paying rent, buying food, finding transportation, or keeping a steady job. When a child is taken into foster care, life becomes even harder for these parents. Right now, Maryland allows the government to charge parents child support even when their children are in foster care. This money does **not** go to the child. Instead, the state keeps the money to pay itself back for foster care costs. This practice is called **cost recovery**.

Between 2020 and 2024, Maryland collected **over \$2.6 million** from parents whose children were in foster care. Many parents cannot afford these payments, so they end up with debt owed to the government. This makes it harder for them to get back on their feet and reunite with their children.

Research shows that charging parents for foster care hurts families. It pushes parents deeper into poverty and can delay children from returning home. Studies also show this practice *does not save money*. In some cases, Maryland spent more money trying to collect child support than it actually received.

In 2022, the federal government told states that child support should **not** be the default option for parents with children in foster care. Federal officials explained that charging struggling parents makes it harder for families to stabilize and reunite. Several states—such as California, Michigan, and Washington—have already stopped or limited this practice.

Senate Bill 319 would do the same in Maryland. The bill would stop the state from routinely filing child support cases against parents with children in foster care while allowing these cases to emerge only in rare situations

Families involved in the child welfare system need support, not punishment. Charging parents child support while their children are in foster care takes money away from housing, food, and transportation—things families need to reunite. For these reasons, I strongly urge a favorable report.