

**Testimony of The University of Baltimore School of Law’s Sayra and Neil Meyerhoff
Center for Families, Children, and the Courts (CFCC)**

In Favor of HB 1272

April 2, 2026

The Sayra and Neil Meyerhoff Center for Families, Children, and the Courts (CFCC) at the University of Baltimore School of Law envisions communities where children and families thrive without unnecessary involvement in the legal system. We engage communities in all that we do to work towards transforming systems that create barriers to family well-being.

CFCC submits this testimony in support of HB 1272, which requires the local department to consider a child’s feelings and views about a potential kinship caregiver for an out-of-home placement. This bill also expands the definition of “kinship caregiver” to include unrelated individuals identified by the child as having a significant bond with that child. This ensures that youth voices are amplified and their lived experiences are considered when facing out-of-home placements. HB 1272 also prioritizes a child’s agency and supports family integrity throughout the out-of-home placement process.

**I. HB 1272 Modernizes Maryland’s Definition of Kinship to Include "Soul Family,"
Aligning State Law with Contemporary Best Practices in Youth Advocacy.**

Expanding the definition of “kinship caregiver” to include unrelated individuals identified by the youth as having a significant bond aligns Maryland law with states utilizing similar legislation to best support children being placed out of the home. For example, Kansas has added a ‘SOUL Family Legal Permanency option’¹ to the existing legal permanency options for youth. SOUL Family allows a youth in foster care to “establish a legal caregiving relationship with one

¹ Kansas Department for Children and Families. (n.d.). *SOUL family legal permanency*.
<https://www.dcf.ks.gov/services/PPS/Pages/SOUL.aspx>

or more adults”² with the goal of “supporting lifelong relationships that connect them to the people they consider their family and community.’ Importantly, this legal placement option “amplifies the voices of older youth in foster care by asking a crucial question: *Who is important to YOU?* This permanency option empowers young people to build their own support systems that will then guide them into adulthood.”³ HB 1272 effectively mirrors this youth-centered legislation by requiring local departments to consider a youth's “feelings and views” when determining an out-of-home placement. HB 1272 ensures that the law prioritizes youth’s lived experiences and allows Maryland to transition to a legal system that honors youth agency and community as they enter out-of-home care.

II. Prioritizing child agency and placement with known caregivers significantly reduces behavioral aggression and enhances placement stability.

Young people facing removal from their biological families are arguably the most impacted individuals in this process. Legislation allowing these youth to provide input on placement will mitigate some of the fear and anxiety surrounding this major change. Additionally, research from The Archive of Pediatric Medicine found that “Children placed into kinship care had fewer behavioral problems three years after placement than children who were placed into foster care. This finding supports efforts to maximize placement of children with willing and available kin when they enter out-of-home care.”⁴ HB 1272 addresses this research by restoring agency to the most affected individuals by allowing them to provide input on a desired placement. Pediatric research also suggests: “placement stability...has consistently been shown to result in better outcomes for all children living in out-of-home care. Children in kinship care are also more likely to remain in their same neighborhood, be placed with siblings, and have consistent contact with their birth parents than children in foster care, all of which might contribute to less disruptive transitions into out-of-home care.”⁵ HB 1272 grants young people the power to

² id.

³ KVC Kansas. (n.d.). *SOUL family permanency option*.
<https://kansas.kvc.org/services/foster-care/soul-family/>

⁴ Rubin, D. M., Downes, K. J., O'Reilly, A. L., Mekonnen, R., Luan, X., & Localio, R. (2008). Impact of kinship care on behavioral well-being for children in out-of-home care. *Archives of pediatrics & adolescent medicine*, 162(6), 550–556. <https://doi.org/10.1001/archpedi.162.6.550>

⁵ id.

identify their own caregivers, reducing the trauma of removal and fostering the long-term stability essential for healthy development.

III. Kinship placements facilitate superior long-term outcomes by maintaining cultural, sibling, and community continuity and by strengthening family integrity, creating a more effective environment for parental rehabilitation.

HB 1272 ideally works to preserve a child's cultural and community relationship while simultaneously creating a stable, safe environment necessary for successful parental rehabilitation and eventual family reunification. A kinship caregiver has the unique ability to understand the individual family and child's circumstances. This would serve to strengthen the family dynamic, allowing the biological parent to access and utilize support services without adding the tension of their child in an unfamiliar out-of-home placement. HB 1272 includes a stipulation requiring a kinship caregiver to cooperate with the child's parent and facilitate contact as ordered by the court. This ensures that the kinship caregiver serves as a collaborative support system rather than a barrier to reunification.

The Sayra and Neil Meyerhoff Center for Families, Children, and the Courts (CFCC) at the University of Baltimore School of Law urges you to vote favorably on HB 1272 as it modernizes Maryland law by recognizing that kinship options identified by young people create a more collaborative environment for family healing, and ensure that the youth impacted by this experience maintain agency and stability during this stressful transition.