



HB915-Workgroup on Aging Out of Foster Care
April 3, 2026
Position: FAVORABLE

Maryland Legal Aid submits written and oral testimony on HB915 at the request of its sponsor, Delegate Terri L. Hill.

Maryland Legal Aid asks that the Committee report **favorably** on House Bill 915, which would establish a Workgroup on Aging Out of Foster Care to assess the resources available to youth leaving foster care, evaluate the effectiveness of existing services, identify gaps, and recommend reforms to improve outcomes for young people transitioning to adulthood. Maryland Legal Aid serves residents in each of Maryland's 24 jurisdictions, providing free legal services to the State's low-income and vulnerable residents in a range of civil legal matters. Maryland Legal Aid is Maryland's largest civil non-profit law firm, representing vulnerable young people in Child in Need of Assistance (CINA) matters across the State. This legislation directly addresses the complex and interconnected challenges that youth aging out of foster care face by establishing a cross-agency, youth-informed Workgroup charged with evaluating and improving the systems that shape their transition to adulthood.

Through its representation of thousands of children and young adults in CINA and related proceedings statewide, Maryland Legal Aid has substantial experience with the challenges youth face as they prepare to leave foster care, including instability in housing, income, health care, education, and supportive adult connections. That experience gives Maryland Legal Aid a well-founded perspective on the needs of transition-age youth and the systemic barriers that too often undermine a successful transition from foster care to adulthood. The scale of the problems facing transition-age youth warrants legislative attention because many Maryland youth who exit foster care report recurring requests for help with rent, food, mental-health services, housing or homeless services, and Medicaid conversion.¹

First, with respect to housing instability, the bill brings together the Department of Housing and Community Development alongside human services leadership to identify existing housing resources, assess their effectiveness, and uncover gaps that leave young people at risk of homelessness. By requiring a comprehensive review of stable housing and related supports such as transportation and financial resources, the Workgroup will lay the foundation for more coordinated and responsive housing strategies. Housing instability is one of the clearest reasons this legislation is necessary. A study published in the *American Journal of Public Health* found that between 31% and 46% of youth aging out of foster care experienced homelessness by age twenty-six.² Maryland's own planning materials identify housing, poverty, and behavioral health

¹ Md. Dep't of Hum. Servs., *Maryland 2025–2029 Child and Family Services Plan* 135–37 (2024).

² Amy Dworsky, Laura Napolitano & Mark E. Courtney, Homelessness During the Transition from Foster Care to Adulthood, 103 *Am. J. Pub. Health* S318, S318–23 (2013).

as areas requiring stronger intervention.³ Stable housing is critical because, without it, every other transition objective from employment to education becomes far more difficult to sustain.

Second, in the area of education and employment, the inclusion of the State Superintendent of Schools and the directive to evaluate educational programs and employment support ensures that the Workgroup will examine whether youth are being adequately prepared for academic success and workforce entry. Importantly, the bill goes beyond inventorying services—it requires an assessment of what is actually effective and what youth are most likely to use, increasing the likelihood of meaningful reform. Education and employment challenges further underscore the need for review. The National Youth in Transition Database indicates that by age twenty-one, only 70% of surveyed foster youth had obtained a high school diploma or GED, only 26% were currently enrolled in school, and just 34% reported full-time employment.⁴

Third, regarding mental and behavioral health, the bill includes the Secretary of Health and representatives from the behavioral health and pediatric communities. It requires evaluation of access to physical and behavioral health care services, recognizing that untreated trauma and mental health needs are significant barriers to stability and self-sufficiency for youth leaving care. Health, behavioral-health, and disability-related needs provide additional justification for legislative action. Young people leaving out-of-home care experience significantly poorer health and psychosocial outcomes than their peers.⁵ Maryland reports indicate recurring requests from former foster youth and stakeholders for assistance with mental-health services and Medicaid conversion, and identify behavioral health as an area requiring stronger intervention.⁶ Maryland also recognizes the need to strengthen coordination with Medicaid and behavioral-health providers, noting that continued access to mental-health, substance-use, and general health care services after foster care is essential for stability and long-term well-being.⁷ The State's planning framework further acknowledges disability-related needs within the foster-care population, including Voluntary Placement Agreements for Children with Disabilities and individualized support services for youth in care.⁸ These provisions highlight a critical challenge: when youth exit foster care without a clear pathway for transition into adulthood, health and disability system disruptions are both likely and consequential.

Fourth, the bill addresses the critical issue of lifelong relationships and supportive connections by centering on the voices of young people themselves. By requiring that at least 15 members of the Workgroup be individuals who are currently or formerly in foster care, this bill seeks to ensure

³ Md. Dep't of Hum. Servs., *Maryland 2025–2029 Child and Family Services Plan* 135 (2024).

⁴ U.S. Dep't of Health & Hum. Servs., Admin. for Children & Families, Children's Bureau, *Outcomes Data Snapshot: National 2* (2022), <https://acf.gov/sites/default/files/documents/cb/nytd-outcomes-md-2021.pdf>.

⁵ David Taylor et al., Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis of Policies and Interventions that Improve Health, Psychosocial, and Economic Outcomes for Young People Leaving the Out-of-Home Care System, 32 *Trauma, Violence & Abuse* 2696 (2024).

⁶ Md. Dep't of Hum. Servs., *Maryland 2025–2029 Child and Family Services Plan* 135 (2024).

⁷ Id. at 139–40.

⁸ Id. at 5.

that recommendations will be informed by lived experience. Additionally, the Workgroup must examine the types of supports youth actually rely on, including trusted adults, peers, and community networks, acknowledging that permanent connections are as essential as formal services. In 2024, 252 Maryland youth left foster care through emancipation, meaning they exited care without reunification, adoption, or guardianship.⁹ Maryland’s Child and Family Services Plan further reports that the proportion of older youth aging out of care remains significantly higher than the national average: in 2021, 64.1% of older youth in Maryland aged out of care compared with 35.3% nationally, with youth of color most likely to do so.¹⁰ National data likewise indicates that, by age twenty-one, only 87% of surveyed foster youth reported a connection to a supportive adult, leaving a substantial minority without even that basic form of support during the transition to adulthood.¹¹ Maryland’s child-welfare framework recognizes that youth require lifelong supports and connections and stronger networks of personal and professional relationships as they move into adulthood.¹² Youth leaving foster care, by contrast, often face an abrupt transition to adulthood with little or no support from either their family or the state.¹³ Without a reliable support network, routine setbacks—such as a missed paycheck, lost identification, or temporary housing disruption—can quickly escalate into crises. Youth leaving care should have meaningful access to the mentors, trusted adults, and community support that families typically provide.

Finally, HB 915 recognizes that these challenges for youth do not exist in isolation. By convening a diverse group of stakeholders across government, legal services, advocacy organizations, and youth leaders, and by requiring a report with findings and recommendations, the bill creates a structured, accountable pathway toward improving outcomes in housing, education, employment, mental health, and long-term stability. Youth-informed policy reviews in other jurisdictions demonstrate that coordinated evaluation can identify unmet needs and structural gaps in transition systems. Louisiana established a Task Force on Youth Aging Out of Foster Care to examine programs and financing options supporting youth transitioning to independence and included former foster youth; it identified several core needs, including education, housing, adult connections, special-needs services, and aftercare support.¹⁴ The task force recommended coordinated, youth-centered solutions—including one-stop transition centers, extended care to age 21, continuous healthcare coverage, targeted financial and educational supports, specialized case management, and expanded transition services—to address systemic gaps and improve outcomes.¹⁵ New York City similarly convened an Interagency Foster Care Task Force that

⁹ U.S. Dep’t of Health & Hum. Servs., Admin. for Children & Families, Children’s Bureau, *Child Welfare Outcomes 2024: Maryland*, <https://cwoutcomes.acf.hhs.gov/cwodatasite/byState/maryland/>.

¹⁰ Md. Dep’t of Hum. Servs., *Maryland 2025–2029 Child and Family Services Plan* 105, 135 (2024).

¹¹ U.S. Dep’t of Health & Hum. Servs., Admin. for Children & Families, Children’s Bureau, *Outcomes Data Snapshot: National 2* (2022), <https://acf.gov/sites/default/files/documents/cb/nytd-outcomes-national-2021.pdf>.

¹² Md. Dep’t of Hum. Servs., *Maryland FY 2025 Annual Progress and Services Report* 191 (2024); Independent Living, Md. Dep’t of Hum. Servs., <https://dhs.maryland.gov/out-of-home-care/youth-resources/independent-living/>.

¹³ U.S. Dep’t of Hous. & Urb. Dev., *Housing for Youth Aging Out of Foster Care: A Literature Review* 1 (2014).

¹⁴ H.C.R. 168, 2015 Reg. Sess. 2–3 (La. 2015); La. Dep’t of Child. & Fam. Servs., *Task Force on Youth Aging Out of Foster Care Final Report* 8–9, 41–42 (Feb. 1, 2017).

¹⁵ La. Dep’t of Child. & Fam. Servs., *supra* note 18, at 49–52.

included current and former foster youth and organized its work around permanency, education, employment, health, and housing. The task force subsequently recommended—and the city implemented—expanded investments in education and employment services and housing priority for eligible youth leaving care.¹⁶ Federal oversight reinforces the importance of such review. The U.S. Government Accountability Office recently found that states offer a range of Chafee-funded transition services, yet federal funds have remained unspent for years despite continuing unmet needs among youth aging out of foster care.¹⁷ A Maryland workgroup would therefore provide a practical mechanism to assess existing supports, identify barriers youth encounter before aging out, ensure that transition services operate effectively in practice, and align policy with the lived experiences of youth who have been in care.

Maryland Legal Aid urges the Committee to issue a FAVORABLE report on House Bill 915 and urges its ultimate passage. If you have any questions, please contact: Erica I. LeMon, Advocacy Director for Children’s Rights at elemon@mdlab.org (410) 951-7648 or (410) 935-0937.

¹⁶ N.Y.C. Admin. for Children’s Servs., *Interagency Foster Care Task Force Final Report* 3–4, 6. (Mar. 2020).

¹⁷ U.S. Gov’t Accountability Off., *Foster Care: HHS Should Help States Address Barriers to Using Federal Funds for Programs Serving Youth Transitioning to Adulthood* 9, 26–27 (2025).