



DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

Wes Moore, Governor · Aruna Miller, Lt. Governor · Stacy L. Rodgers, Acting Secretary

April 2, 2026

The Honorable William C. Smith, Jr., Chair
Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
2 East Miller, Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

**RE: TESTIMONY ON HB 1272 - FAMILY LAW - KINSHIP CARE - POSITION:
FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS**

Dear Chair Smith and Members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee:

The Maryland Department of Human Services (DHS) thanks the Committee for its consideration and respectfully requests that the Committee issue an unfavorable report for House Bill 1272 (HB 1272).

With offices in every one of Maryland's jurisdictions, DHS provides preventative and supportive services, economic assistance, and meaningful connections to employment development and career opportunities to assist Marylanders in reaching their full potential. Our Social Services Administration (SSA) implements the Out-of-Home Care (OOH) program which is affected by HB 1272. If enacted, HB 1272 is likely to limit kinship placements and impede implementation of Maryland's kinship placement law while reversing progress made by our investment in Family Matters culture change.

Since 2023 DHS worked to shift the culture of our child welfare system with our Family Matters approach to ensuring that youth experiencing foster care have and maintain connections with their family, community, and culture. Placement with kin, whether by blood or by choice, is critical to preventing an experience in foster care from permanently disrupting relationships that support youths' social and emotional development. HB 1272 adds placement requirements to statutes codifying our departmental Kinship Placement bill from 2023, [SB 708](#) / [HB 1499](#). In addition, HB 1272 would change our complete rewrite of [COMAR 07.02.09 - Kinship Care Program](#) which has only been in effect for one year. We also implemented new licensing regulations so kinship caregivers have the same financial support as resource homes, [24-06 Kinship Care Licensing Standards](#). SSA has only been implementing the kinship

placement law and supporting regulations for a year. No evidence suggests that additional placement criteria are necessary. No additional kinship placement requirements are needed.

In addition, HB 1272 conflates placement criteria with areas for assessment and support when licensing a potential kinship caregiver. [COMAR 07.02.06.03 Requirements for Kinship Resource Home Licensing](#) requires local departments of social services (LDSS) to complete the Kinship Caregiver and Home Assessment prior to licensing a kinship caregiver. The assessment identifies areas where a potential kinship caregiver may need support to become a licensed placement. The Kinship Caregiver Assessment largely concerns licensing, not placement. For example, two potential kinship caregivers could pursue licensing for the same child, but only one will become the placement. The licensing assessment items are not, and were never intended to be, legal placement criteria. There is a monumental difference between areas for support and placement criteria.

HB 1272 would turn areas for potential support into requirements for placement, including:

- How do you describe your relationship or bond with the child(ren)'s parents or guardians?
- What do you know about the reasons that led to the child(ren) being placed into out-of-home care?
- What is your understanding of the child(ren)'s past and current difficult experiences or trauma?
- What is your plan to support the child(ren) in addressing this trauma?

The proposed placement criteria would undermine our kin-first culture and weaken state law prioritizing kinship placements. The additional criteria proposed concern a potential kinship caregiver's prior knowledge of or relationship with a child. The proposed criteria would make it more difficult to place a child with kin if the initial placement was in a non-kin resource home. A foster family may know more about the child or situation than a potential kinship caregiver because the foster family was connected with the agency before the child's kin were identified. The proposed criteria would also make kinship placement more difficult if the child lacked a prior relationship with the potential kinship caregiver; for example when a child's paternal grandmother seeks placement after learning she has a grandchild. HB 1272 would require a kinship caregiver's prior knowledge or relationship with a child in every case, even when it isn't necessary or undermines the benefits to the child of a kinship placement.

Maryland's kinship law prefers kinship placements because children's familial, cultural, and community ties are critical to their social and emotional well-being. Maryland's kinship law already includes opportunities to assert good cause why a

kinship placement is not in a child's best interest. Additionally, in determining the best interest of a child, an LDSS or court may already consider the criteria proposed in HB1227, where appropriate. Maryland law already enables age-appropriate youth to voice their opinions about placements. Children who feel heard and have input into where they live are more likely to experience placement stability, emotional safety, and trust in the child welfare system. In the House we proposed an amendment to clarify that the proposed criteria may not be necessary in every case. However, our amendment was not accepted in the House. We believe that HB 1227 is unlikely to create harm in many cases. However, it will negatively impact our efforts to create a kin-first child welfare system and it will do so without any demonstration that the changes are needed as proposed.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide unfavorable testimony to the Committee for consideration during your deliberations. If you require additional information, please contact Justin Hayes, Acting Director of Government Affairs, at justin.hayes1@maryland.gov.

In service,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Gloria Brown Burnett". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "G".

Gloria Brown Burnett
Deputy Secretary for Operations