

THE COALITION TO PROTECT MARYLAND'S CHILDREN

Our Mission: To combine and amplify the power of organizations and citizens working together to keep children safe from abuse and neglect. We strive to secure budgetary and public policy resources to make meaningful and measurable improvements in safety, permanence, and wellbeing.



HB915 – Workgroup on Aging Out of Foster Care

Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

April 3, 2026

Position: SUPPORT

The Coalition to Protect Maryland's Children is a consortium of organizations and individuals formed in 1992 who are concerned about the care of Maryland's most vulnerable children and work together to educate and promote meaningful child welfare reform. **CPMC urges a favorable report on HB0915 - Workgroup on Aging Out of Foster Care.**

Emerging adults who age out of out-of-home care - exiting the state foster care system without a permanent family - face significantly higher risks of housing instability, unemployment, and behavioral health challenges. Many young people in out-of-home placements also lose connections with family members and lack consistent relationships with supportive adults. In FY2024, 1,483 children exited Maryland foster care, of whom 252 aged out – at an approximate 17% rate. In the same year, 176,745 children exited care across the nation, with 15,379 aging out – approximately at 9%.¹ This disparity highlights the need for ample transition supports in our state.

Our coalition appreciates all that the Maryland General Assembly has accomplished over the years to support youth having experienced out-of-home care. There are some bills this session that touch on ways to advance young peoples' personal goals **before they age out** of the system, such as clarifying reasonable efforts and plans to meet basic needs and realize self-sufficiency, making the costs of college education and vocational programs more feasible, and gaining access to eligible benefits to jump start long-term financial security. Although programs exist to support young adults preparing to leave foster care, the transition to fortify and maintain independence often remains fragmented and difficult to navigate.

Over the years, we have observed how youth are often the objects of public policy, and rarely the agents of it. HB0915 seeks to bring 15 young people, ages 18 to 25 who are in the process of or have already aged out of the Maryland foster care system, together in a workgroup with state agencies, service providers, and advocates to identify supportive mechanisms for **after leaving the system**. The House amended the bill to allow stipends for participating youth.

Our coalition members have been approached with ideas to help youth – ranging from digital apps with information about resources to hotlines or text lines to community networks of retired volunteers. However, to do this right, we need to be informed by young people with

¹ U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Administration for Children & Families, Administration on Children, Youth, & Families, Children's Bureau - Children Exiting Foster Care
https://tableau-public.acf.gov/views/afcars_dashboard_main_page/exits-exitreason?%3Aembed=y&%3AisGuestRedirectFromVizportal=y&%3Amobile=true

lived experience their ideas and perspectives to consider possible options, feasibility, and usefulness – with an eye of what could be replicable across all jurisdictions. For example, a Maryland survey of foster care alumni in the rural mid-shore region found that while many youth had secure housing for the first three months after exiting care, the majority soon struggled to afford rent. As a result, 100% reported experiencing housing instability and 99% had stayed in emergency shelters within six months of leaving care.²

Including youth voices helps ensure that recommendations reflect the real barriers young people face entering adulthood. The workgroup will review existing resources and identify gaps in services related to housing stability, food security, transportation, employment, education, healthcare, and more. This evaluation will help provide a clearer understanding of how current systems support youth and where improvements are needed. Equally important is the workgroup's role in identifying programs that have successfully improved outcomes for youth leaving foster care as well as those in the first few years after. By examining effective models and highlighting supports that do work, Maryland can strengthen pathways toward stability and self-sufficiency for young adults transitioning out of the foster care system.

The workgroup will be staffed by the Citizen's Review Board for Children, which reviews cases of foster care children across Maryland in all 24 jurisdictions. Such reviews often reveal challenges young people face in preparing to age out of care. The workgroup will be tasked with:

- identifying the types of resources available for youth to help them achieve self-sufficiency and successfully transition into adulthood,
- learning about the effectiveness of available resources and the challenges in accessing current services and programs,
- determining types of resources that youth who have aged out are most likely to utilize,
- identifying programs that that have successfully improved outcomes for youth who have aged out of foster care, and
- submitting a report of its findings and recommendations by July 1, 2027, to help inform policy reform ideas, implementation efforts, as well as emergent issues that the state should be addressing.

We welcome any efforts to further the success of these young people who have been placed in the care of the state. It is for these reasons that the Coalition to Protect Maryland's Children **urges a favorable report on HB0915 - Workgroup on Aging Out of Foster Care.**³

² Harburger, D.S. & Greeno, E. J. (2016). Thrive@25 Phase 1: Maryland's Planning Grant to End and Prevent Homelessness for Youth with Foster Care Histories on the Rural Mid-Shore. (Final Report). Baltimore, MD: The Institute for Innovation & Implementation, University of Maryland School of Social Work. For more information, visit: <https://www.youthreachmd.com/content/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/YRMD-Foster-Youth-Policy-Paper.pdf>

³ Members of CPMC represented by this written testimony include the American Academy of Pediatrics - MD Chapter, The Arc Northern Chesapeake Region, Arrow Child & Family Ministries, Center for Hope, Child Justice, Citizens Review Board for Children, CASA of Baltimore County, Inc., The Family Tree, Maryland Association of Resources for Families and Youth (MARFY), Maryland Children's Alliance, Maryland Legal Aid, Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence, National Association of Social Workers-MD, State Council on Child Abuse and Neglect, and individual members of the coalition.