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2016-2018

February 11<sup>th</sup>, 2026

### **Madame Chair Bartlett, and Members of the House Judiciary Committee,**

CASA of Cecil County urges favorable support of House Bill 0481 and its provisions to ensure visitation for all children, including those in foster care. Children in foster care, as we know, have already experienced trauma, which is often exacerbated when visitation with parents—and frequently siblings—is inconsistent or treated as optional. When visitations are delayed, limited, or missed without rescheduling, it undermines not only the best interest of the child, but also the fundamental goal of family reunification. Sibling visitations in particular are often deprioritized, causing sibling bonds to deteriorate at a time when stability and connection are most critical.

Research supports what families and child advocates see firsthand. According to the **American Bar Association**, regular and frequent visitation between children in foster care and their parents is strongly associated with improved child well-being, reduced behavioral challenges, shorter stays in out-of-home care, and a significantly greater likelihood of successful reunification. The ABA describes visitation as “the heart of permanency planning,” noting that consistent parent-child contact promotes healthy attachment and mitigates the trauma of separation.

HB 0481 appropriately recognizes visitation as a critical need for children rather than a discretionary service. By promoting consistent visitation and requiring the rescheduling of missed visits, this legislation acts in the best interest of children and meaningfully supports families working toward reunification.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jennifer Martin

CASA OF Cecil County



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