



Office of The Mayor Celina R. Benitez

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February 24, 2026

Re: **Strong support of House Bill 923**

Chair Bartlett, Vice Chair Davis, and Members of the Judiciary Committee:

On behalf of the City of Mount Rainier, I respectfully submit this testimony in **strong support of House Bill 923**, the Uniform Nondiscrimination in Treatment and Evidence (UNITE) Act. This legislation affirms that equity courts must apply the same standards and procedures in child custody and guardianship proceedings regardless of a child's immigration status, ensuring fairness, consistency, and child-centered decision-making.

Mount Rainier is one of Maryland's most diverse communities, home to families from a wide range of cultural, racial, and national backgrounds. For cities like Mount Rainier, protecting families and ensuring that all children are treated equitably within the legal system is not an abstract concern, it is central to community stability and public safety.

HB 923 is important because it makes clear that custody and guardianship decisions should be guided by a child's best interests, not by implicit bias, procedural inconsistency, or a child's immigration status. When families have confidence that courts will treat children fairly and consistently, they are more likely to seek help when it is needed, whether to protect a child from harm, secure stable guardianship, or prevent exploitation and neglect. This trust strengthens families and, in turn, strengthens communities.

Ensuring uniform treatment promotes clarity for courts, practitioners, and families while reinforcing Maryland's commitment to fairness and due process.

For these reasons, the City of Mount Rainier urges the Committee to issue a **favorable report on House Bill 923**.

Thank you for your consideration and for your leadership in advancing policies that protect children, strengthen families, and support safe, inclusive communities. Please feel free to contact me at 301-985-6585 or via email MayorBenitez@MountRainierMd.org if you have any questions.

Respectfully submitted,

Celina R. Benitez

Mayor Celina R. Benitez, City of Mount Rainier.