



DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

Wes Moore, Governor · Aruna Miller, Lt. Governor · Rafael López, Secretary

February 5, 2026

The Honorable J. Sandy Bartlett, Chair
House Judiciary Committee
6 Bladen Street
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: TESTIMONY ON HB0384 - CHILD SUPPORT - CAPACITY OF MINORS TO INITIATE AND DEFEND AN ACTION - POSITION: INFORMATION

Dear Chair Bartlett and Members of the Judiciary Committee:

The Maryland Department of Human Services (DHS) thanks the Committee for its consideration and the opportunity to provide information on House Bill (HB) 384.

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 Child Support Administration (CSA) implements the child support program which is affected by HB 384. It is the position of DHS that Marylanders should be empowered to provide for their children and we look forward to collaborating with the Committee to advance this vision.

HB 384 would allow minor parents the right to initiate or defend an action for child support. Under this legislation, CSA would work with unemancipated minors when our services are requested through application or referral the same way we assist adults and emancipated minors that seek our services. Under current law, an unemancipated minor parent must have an adult initiate or defend actions for child support on their behalf. DHS appreciates that unemancipated minor parents without an adult willing to take this action on their behalf are not served by our current system. We do not have specific data on how many minor parents are in this situation. However, in general, while Maryland's teen birth rate has declined over the last decade, there are over 10 births for every 1,000 females aged 15-19 according to the most recent data available.¹

¹ Data from the Annie E. Casey Foundation and the Maryland Center on Economic Policy, accessed on 1/28/2026.

While child support is a key financial resource for parents of all ages that formalizes the legal responsibility for a child shared by both parents, DHS is keenly aware of the follow-on legal impacts of filing a child support case. We believe minor parents considering a child support filing would benefit from having an advocate or educator assist them with understanding the potential outcomes of taking this legal action, however, the Child Support Administration cannot serve in this advocacy role. There may be opportunities for collaboration with nonprofit organizations to provide these services should HB 384 become law.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide a letter of interest 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 black ink, appearing to read 'Rafael López', written in a cursive style.

Rafael López
Secretary

<https://datacenter.aecf.org/data/tables/4471-teen-birth-rate?loc=22&loct=2#detailed/2/any/false/2545,1095,2048,574,1729,37,871,870,573,869/any/15346>