

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.



HB0923 - Family Law - Equity Courts - Care and Custody of Children (Uniform Nondiscrimination in Treatment and Evidence (UNITE) Act)

House Judiciary Committee

February 26, 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 HB0923 - Family Law - Equity Courts - Care and Custody of Children (Uniform Nondiscrimination in Treatment and Evidence (UNITE) Act).**

Amid the recent surge of Immigration and Custom Enforcement (ICE) agents detaining and deporting adults, child welfare advocates have been observing the effects on the children of these individuals and instances of familial separation. In Maryland, children separated from parents detained by ICE may enter state foster care if no family or emergency contact is available, and if there is no relative or "standby guardian" identified to prevent children from going into care.¹ A recent investigative report revealed that at least nine children entered the Maryland foster care system after their parents were detained or deported.² These children and youth should have the right to fullest legal relief possible to ensure their health and safety.

HB00923 seeks to ensure that jurisdictions across the state are uniform in the way the courts require identification and other supporting documents for children of immigrants in care and custody cases. The legislation call for no undue procedural burdens on minority children and families, specifically on requiring disproportionate proof of identity for Special Immigration Juvenile Status (SIJS) cases.

This issue of identification also arises in other types of family law cases. No court should create special procedures which further frustrate identification barriers for immigrant children. Many of the children at issue cannot obtain a passport without the consent of the parents who have abandoned or abused them unless their caretaker has a custody order granting them legal custody. These children are often ineligible for other forms of state or school-issued ID due to their age. This confluence of factors creates a classic "catch-22" situation: petitioners need a custody order from a court to obtain photographic identification but cannot access the courts to petition for custody without the identification.

¹ <https://www.beluminus.org/standby/>

² <https://vtdigger.org/2026/02/11/immigration-detentions-push-dozens-of-children-into-foster-care-including-in-vermont/>

HB0923 seeks to reaffirm Maryland's commitment to equal justice by ensuring that immigrant children and their caregivers are not subjected to procedural hurdles that have no basis in statute or rule. By eliminating unnecessary identification and affidavit requirements that may be imposed in a small number of jurisdictions, the legislation restores uniformity across the state and protects meaningful access to the courts. Passing this bill would ensure that every child - regardless of immigration status - stands on equal footing before Maryland's judicial system.

It is for these reasons that the Coalition to Protect Maryland's Children **urges a favorable report on HB0923 - Family Law - Equity Courts - Care and Custody of Children (Uniform Nondiscrimination in Treatment and Evidence (UNITE) Act).**³

³ Members of CPMC represented by this written testimony include – the American Academy of Pediatrics - Maryland Chapter, Child Justice, Center for Hope, Citizen's Review Board for Children, Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA - Baltimore County), The Family Tree, Maryland Association of Resources for Families and Youth (MARFY), Maryland Coalition Against Sexual Assault, Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence, National Association of Social Workers – MD (NASW), the State Council on Child Abuse & Neglect (SCCAN).