



OUT FOR JUSTICE

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 48:

Right to Fight Act

TO: Members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings and House Judiciary Committee

FROM: **Dwan Burton, Deputy Director, Out For Justice Inc.**

My name is Dwan Burton, and I am submitting this written testimony on behalf of Out for Justice, Inc. (OFJ), a grassroots organization whose mission is to engage, educate, and empower individuals impacted by the legal system. We support **House Bill 48**, which will repeal the authorization for a juvenile court to waive a local department's obligation to provide certain services if a parent has involuntarily lost certain parental rights.

As the Deputy Director of Out For Justice, I have seen firsthand the devastating impacts of the current legal precedents regarding involuntary loss of parental rights. We specifically support women who have returned home from incarceration, many of whom involuntarily lost parental rights while they were incarcerated, and reach out to Out for Justice, pursuing assistance in navigating the legal process.

One particular case that stood out was that of a disabled member whose daughter was forcibly removed from her care upon incarceration. After faithfully serving and reentering society, the member discovered that her daughter had been adopted by a family nearby. Despite never having displayed any violence or having ever harmed her daughter, she has been prevented from ever contacting her daughter. Today, she lives with the knowledge that her only daughter lives closeby but remains inaccessible.

As it currently stands, the law does not require reasonable efforts to reunify a child with their guardian if a parent has involuntarily lost parental rights. The proposed changes in House Bill 48 will strengthen family reunification efforts while maintaining the courts' ability to waive reunification in cases of abuse or other similar concerns. If **House Bill 48** is passed into law, marginalized families across Maryland will be able **to reunify with their child safely and without delay, while also maintaining the safety of the children involved.** For these reasons, I respectfully urge a favorable report.