



**DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES**

*Wes Moore, Governor · Aruna Miller, Lt. Governor · Gloria Brown Burnett, Interim Secretary*

February 26, 2026

The Honorable J. Sandy Bartlett, Chair  
House Judiciary Committee  
100 Taylor House Office Building  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

**RE: TESTIMONY ON HB0923 - FAMILY LAW - EQUITY COURTS - CARE AND CUSTODY OF CHILDREN (UNIFORM NONDISCRIMINATION IN TREATMENT AND EVIDENCE (UNITE) ACT - POSITION: FAVORABLE**

Dear Chair Bartlett and Members of the Judiciary Committee:

The Maryland Department of Human Services (DHS) thanks the Committee for its consideration and respectfully requests a favorable report on House Bill 923 (HB 923).

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. While HB 923 does not impose direct statutory duties on DHS, the bill has an indirect impact on our Social Services Administration (SSA) Office of Family Advocacy due to its engagement with immigrant children and families. HB 923, also known as the UNITE Act, would help ensure that Maryland courts treat immigrant children exactly the same as U.S. citizen children in custody and guardianship cases.

The UNITE Act supports fair and equitable access to court remedies by emphasizing the legislative intent that immigrant children are protected against discrimination and that courts apply the same procedures for immigrant children as are applied to all children. HB 923 addresses concerns that immigrant children may face inconsistent standards, procedural barriers, or bias in court custody and guardianship proceedings, particularly when seeking Special Immigration Juvenile Status (SIJS). HB 923 makes clear that every child in Maryland has the right to safety, stability, and permanency, regardless of their immigration status.

HB 923 does not directly change DHS program regulations or policies. DHS staff will continue to provide documentation and support for immigrant children and in SIJS cases as part of standard court interactions and in alignment with existing practices. HB 923 would support the partnership between DHS program staff and the courts by addressing standards and procedures. [Social Services Administration Policy 15-11, Unaccompanied Refugee Minors](#), continues to reflect our commitment to serving all children and families.

HB 923 would have a positive impact, as immigrant children in custody or guardianship cases are more likely to be children of color and may face different barriers in court. By emphasizing that the same procedures apply to all children in care, regardless of their immigration status, HB 923 promotes fairness and equal access to resources. HB 923 would also positively impact Legal Service Providers and Nonprofit Organizations who help ensure that every child in Maryland has the right to safety, stability, and permanency, regardless of their immigration status or that of their parents, kinship caregivers, or guardians.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide favorable testimony 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](mailto:justin.hayes1@maryland.gov).

In service,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Gloria Brown Burnett". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Gloria Brown Burnett  
Interim Secretary