

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.



**HB0384 - Child Support - Capacity of Minors to Initiate and
Defend an Action
House Judiciary Committee
February 5, 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 HB0384 - Child Support - Capacity of Minors to Initiate and Defend an Action.**

Among the wide scope of children and youth who have experienced involvement with the child welfare system, our coalition supports policy efforts to support older youth preparing for the aging out process and their transition into adulthood. National studies consistently show that young females who have been in foster care are two to three times more likely to become pregnant during adolescence than their peers who have not been in foster care. For many of these young parents, aging out of the foster care system means transitioning to adulthood without a similar financial safety net that most parents rely on. Without the legal capacity to independently pursue child support, these youth are denied the right to access financial support which would improve their ability to parent their own children and obtain essential resources for housing, childcare, and other basic needs. Allowing minors to initiate and defend child support actions ensures these preparing to leave care can secure the financial support necessary to provide for their children and break cycles of poverty and dependency.

Research shows that youth in foster care experience disproportionately high rates of early pregnancy and parenting. According to report on Maryland's Title IV-E State Plan, as of June 30, 2018, 83 youth in foster care were identified as pregnant or parenting, with 49 dependent children.¹ This is a figure the state acknowledges likely underrepresents the true scope due to inconsistent reporting across local departments, but we do know that the average number of Maryland children and youth in out-of-home care is 3,800. Using Maryland child welfare administrative data, researchers found that in 2008 the foster care birth rate was 92.7 births per 1,000 girls in care, compared to 32.7 births per 1,000 in the general teenage population.²

¹ [Maryland Department of Human Services, Social Services Administration, Family First Prevention Services Act, TITLE IV-E PREVENTION PLAN, December 12, 2019](#)

² [University of Maryland, Baltimore School of Social Work "Fostering Safe Choices" Shaw, Barth, Svoboda, & Shaikh, December 31, 2010](#)

It is for these reasons that the Coalition to Protect Maryland's Children **urges a favorable report on HB0384 - *Child Support - Capacity of Minors to Initiate and Defend an Action.***³

³ Members of CPMC represented by this written testimony include Center for Hope, Child Justice, Citizens Review Board for Children, Court Appointed Special Advocates (MD CASA), Court Appointed Special Advocates (Baltimore County), Everstand, Maryland Association of Resources for Families and Youth (MARFY), Maryland Children's Alliance, Maryland Legal Aid, National Association of Social Workers – MD Chapter, State Council on Child Abuse and Neglect (SCCAN), and individual members of the coalition.