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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
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Testimony in Support of HB 1305: State Child Welfare System - Reporting

Chair Wilkins and esteemed members of the Ways and Means Committee, it is my pleasure to come before you and offer testimony in favor of **House Bill 1305: State Child Welfare System – Reporting**. This bill is designed to create a data landscape to enhance better policymaking.

Students involved in the child welfare system frequently encounter substantial barriers to educational success. Placement changes often result in multiple school transitions, which can disrupt learning, delay enrollment, and cause students to lose academic progress. As a result, children in foster care are more likely to struggle academically, require special education services, and face obstacles to graduating from high school and/or entering college. Despite the seriousness of these challenges, data about fostering youth in the education system is often fragmented across agencies and difficult to analyze comprehensively. **HB 1305** aims to improve the collection and reporting of critical information, including school stability and the educational supports students receive. This data will allow the state to identify patterns, evaluate existing policies, and develop more effective strategies to support these students.

Legislators currently receive data on how foster youth perform across various educational metrics from the Maryland State Department of Education's (MSDE) *MD Public Schools Students in the State Child Welfare System Report* and the Maryland Longitudinal Data System's (MLDS) *Higher Education Participation for Youth in Foster Care in High School* dashboard. MSDE's report includes information about student mobility, grade retention, dropout rates, and absenteeism of youth in foster care. MLDS's report includes information on postsecondary outcomes, including college-going patterns, placement type while in care, access to financial aid, and college graduation rates. However, neither report includes comparison data with non-foster care peers, which would help make these data useful for us as policy makers.

As drafted, **HB1305** adds a requirement to include comparison data in MSDE's annual reporting requirements. The bill also requires a one-time study to identify the best practices from other states, identify needs and gaps in services that could improve educational outcomes, and provide recommendations for improving data collection and reporting requirements.

While Maryland has created great programs to support foster youth throughout their educational endeavors, it is essential to continue examining and adopting best practices from around the country. Keeping policies current and responsive to these evolving needs will help ensure foster youth have greater opportunities to succeed and provide legislators with the data necessary to craft more effective, evidence-based policies. I urge a favorable report on **House Bill 1305**. Thank you.