
DATE: February 25, 2020

BILL NUMBER: HB 986 **COMMITTEE:** Appropriations

BILL TITLE: State Welfare System - Reporting

DHR POSITION: Support with Amendments

The Department of Human Services (the Department) respectfully submits this letter of support with amendments regarding House Bill 986 (HB 986). HB 986 alters the contents of the Department’s annual report on Child Welfare Performance Indicators. This legislation alters the information required in the report by including five additional pieces of information about children and foster youth in the State child welfare system.

House Bill 986 expands the scope of the reporting requirements originally adopted in § 5-1312 in the Family Law Article during the 2015 Maryland General Assembly. The current report contains 11 questions that are required to be provided and broken out by jurisdiction, race, gender, and age. HB 986 will expand that to 16 questions by adding the following:

- incidences of abuse or neglect of a child who, in the immediately preceding 24 months, was not removed from their home following an investigation that found indicated or unsubstantiated abuse or neglect;
- the number of children in the custody of a local department or child placement agency who have a sibling in the custody of a different local department of child placement agency;
- the health and mental health care provided, as designated;
- the number of children not enrolled in school for more than one week immediately following a change in placement; and
- the number of children in an institution of postsecondary education, apprenticeship, or adult education program.

The Department is supportive of this legislation as it will help Maryland meet federally required provisions in Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which is intended to ensure educational stability among children in foster care. Increased information about the children in our care and their well-being, welfare, and futures is critical to continue to ensure that these children reach their full potential. The Department believes that these additional performance indicators are essential to measure as we continue to serve those in our care. The Department will continue to work in collaboration with our sister agencies in obtaining information about school enrollment, health and mental health care, and other post graduation opportunities.

The Departments suggests one small amendment for clarity. On page 2, line 7 strike “and foster youth,” by definition “foster youth” are children under the care of the Department who are in out-of-home placements and therefore do not receive in-home services.

For these reasons, the Maryland Department of Human Services supports this bill with amendments as it will continue to provide Maryland with the information necessary to continue providing care for Maryland’s most vulnerable population. The Department respectfully requests that the Committee return a favorable report with amendments to HB 986.

