

BILL NUMBER: House Bill 930

COMMITTEE: Judiciary

BILL TITLE: Family Law - Removal of Child From Home - Meetings

DHS POSITION: Letter of Information

The Department of Human Services (DHS) respectfully offers this letter of information regarding House Bill 930 (HB 930). House Bill 930 would require that at any meeting of a local department of social services during which the removal of a child from the child's home is discussed, specific information be redacted and prohibited from sharing. .

Fair and impartial assessments of the needs of children and families are an important issue for child welfare and human service agencies. This is why the DHS Social Services Administration has developed an Integrated Practice Model with guiding principles which center around cultural and linguistic responsiveness. This Integrated Practice Model has an intentional emphasis on implicit bias and power differential in relationships with families, cultural humility, and building authentic partnerships with families. The Department works to involve families in making informed decisions about the safety and well-being of their children.

According to DHS policy and practice expectations, any time a Local Department of Social Services (LDSS) is considering the removal of a child from a child's home and the child is not at imminent risk, the LDSS conducts a Family Involvement Meeting (FIM) to discuss options to divert the removal and develop a safety plan. As outlined in DHS policy, FIMs are defined as a case work practice designed to convene family members during key child welfare decision points with the goal of developing plans that support the safest and least restrictive placement for a child, as well as permanency and well-being options. By necessity, information about the child and their family will be revealed by their involvement in removal decisions.

In addition, by redacting this information, the LDSS may face unique challenges in providing the necessary and effective services to children and families. The Department is committed to making every effort to keep children in their community of origin if a removal is needed. Often this kind of information aids the Department in keeping the family involved during this decision-making process.

It is the mission of the Department to aggressively pursue opportunities to protect Maryland's vulnerable children and to support families as the first resource for the well-being of their children. An individualized approach, which considers many of the elements listed in this bill as needing to be redacted and prohibited from discussion, ultimately serves both children and their families better.

The Department appreciates the opportunity to share this information regarding HB 930 and respectfully requests this information be taken into account during the Committee's deliberations.

