

February 20, 2024

The Honorable Will Smith, Chair
Judicial Proceedings Committee
Miller Senate Office Building, 2 East
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

**RE: TESTIMONY ON SB 668 - Department of Human Services - Children in Foster Care -
Luggage - POSITION: FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS**

Dear Chair Smith and members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee:

The Maryland Department of Human Services (DHS) thanks the Committee for the opportunity to provide support with recommended amendments to strengthen Senate Bill 668 (SB 668). With offices in every one of Maryland's jurisdictions, DHS provides preventive services, support, and care for children entering out-of-home services through kinship and foster care. The Social Services Administration (SSA) within DHS implements the state's child welfare program which serves the children SB 668 would benefit through the provision of new luggage for their belongings.

On February 15, 2024, DHS submitted a Letter of Information regarding House Bill 542, the cross-file of SB 668. Senate Bill 668 directly addresses concerns around the dignity of every child entering care or transitioning between out-of-home placements. To be clear: no child should ever have their belongings transported in trash bags. Such practices by DHS and/or any of its partners is unacceptable.

We reached out to each of the 24 Local Departments of Social Services (LDSS) to better understand the policy and practice related to providing luggage to children and youth. Though we verified that every LDSS has luggage available at the local level, we also learned there is no formal Department policy clearly articulating expectations on this matter. That ends now. We drafted and will issue immediate policy guidance to all LDSS on providing luggage to children and youth in our care; whether it's at the time of entry or a change in placement.

Local departments have developed strategies over the years to address the need for children and youth to have appropriate luggage items when they enter foster care and during placement changes to ensure no disposable bags are used to transport belongings. New luggage is currently provided through a range of locally driven, community partnerships, including donations from non-profit organizations, the local social services board, or through the use of State resources. Luggage is replenished as necessary by the local departments.



Making sure every child in kinship or foster care receives new luggage when they enter care is of critical importance. It is also essential that children have appropriate luggage when experiencing a placement change. As such, the Department recommends the bill address all children in care-not just at the time of entry-including those who are not in a traditional "household" and those who may be transitioning placements by amending § 5-505.2(C)(1) to read as follows:

~~(C) (1) SUBJECT TO PARAGRAPHS (2) AND (3) OF THIS SUBSECTION, THE DEPARTMENT SHALL PROVIDE NEW LUGGAGE TO A CHILD IN FOSTER CARE WHO IS BEING REMOVED FROM A HOUSEHOLD, AND~~
WHEN A CHILD OR YOUTH ENTERS CARE, IS MOVING FROM ONE FOSTER CARE PLACEMENT TO ANOTHER, OR IS LEAVING FOSTER CARE, THE DEPARTMENT WILL PROVIDE THE CHILD OR YOUTH WITH APPROPRIATE LUGGAGE, TAKING INTO ACCOUNT THE CHILD OR YOUTH'S AGE, MOBILITY, PREFERENCES, AND THE PERSONAL ITEMS TO BE TRANSPORTED.

The Department recommends adding to § 5-505.2(C) the following language:

(4) PLASTIC TRASH BAGS AND DISPOSABLE BAGS MAY NOT BE USED TO TRANSPORT ANY ITEMS FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN CARE.

We support Senate Bill 668 with these amendments meant to strengthen the bill. We must all raise the bar of excellence in our work to ensure that every child and youth is treated with the respect and dignity they deserve. We look forward to your decision and welcome continued collaboration on SB 668.

We respectfully request a favorable report from the Committee with our recommended amendments.

If you require additional information, please contact Rachel Sledge, Director of Government Affairs, at rachel.sledge@maryland.gov.

In service,



Rafael López
Secretary