

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 the budgetary and public policy resources to make meaningful and measurable improvements in safety, permanence, and wellbeing.

HB0542 - Department of Human Services – Children in Foster Care – Luggage.

Presented to *The House Judiciary Committee*

February 15, 2024

POSITION: SUPPORT

The Coalition to Protect Maryland's Children (CPMC) is a consortium of Maryland organizations and individuals formed in 1996 to promote meaningful child welfare reform.¹ **CPMC urges a favorable report on the Department of Human Services – Children in Foster Care – Luggage.**

The transition for children entering or moving within the foster care system is a period marked by uncertainty, anxiety, and often, a sense of loss. For many of these children, the process involves moving their belongings in trash bags, which, albeit unintentionally, sends a disheartening message about their worth and stability in life. Providing new luggage is a seemingly small gesture that can significantly impact these children's self-esteem and sense of security.

HB0542 would establish and maintain a decentralized supply of new luggage to be used to transport the personal belongings of a child in foster care and require the Department to provide new luggage to a child who is being removed from a household under certain circumstances. More than just a policy change; it is a statement by our state that we see and value each child within the foster care system. This bill acknowledges the challenges faced by these children and takes a step towards alleviating the additional burden of feeling like their belongings, and by extension, their lives, are disposable.

The importance of this bill extends beyond the physical luggage. It is about instilling a sense of dignity and respect in these young individuals. It tells them that they are worth the investment, that their comfort matters, and that they are not alone during this tumultuous time in their lives. Such positive reinforcement is crucial for their emotional and psychological well-being. Moreover, the implementation of HB0542 can serve as a model for compassionate care in foster systems nationwide, showcasing our state's commitment to enhancing the foster care experience and setting a precedent for others to follow.

In conclusion, we urge you to consider the profound impact that passing HB0542 will have on the lives of countless children within our foster care system. Let us come together to make a meaningful difference in their lives by providing them with the dignity of new luggage during their transitions. Your support for this bill is a step towards reaffirming our collective responsibility towards the well-being of all children in our care.

For the aforementioned reasons, the Coalition to Protect Maryland's Children urges the House Judiciary Committee to make a favorable report on HB0542-Department of Human Services – Children in Foster Care – Luggage.

¹ CMPC members in favor of this bill include: Board of Child Care, Center for Hope, Child Justice, Citizens' Review Board for Children, FCN Foundation, The Franklin Law Group, P.C., Maryland Association of Resources for Families and Youth, Maryland Children's Alliance, Maryland Coalition Against Sexual Assault, MOMCares, National Association of Social Workers - Maryland Chapter, Tim Briceland – Betts (individual), Diana Philip (individual)