

# **CenterForHope HB542 Testimony Session 2024.pdf**

Uploaded by: Adam Rosenberg

Position: FAV

A LIFEBRIDGE HEALTH GROUP

# CENTER FOR HOPE

Advancing hope, healing and resilience



Date: February 13, 2024

To: Chair Clippinger, Vice Chair Bartlett and the Judiciary Committee Members

Reference: House Bill 542, Department of Human Services - Children in Foster Care - Luggage

Position: FAVORABLE

Dear Chair Clippinger and Committee Members:

On behalf of LifeBridge Health's Center for Hope we thank you for this opportunity to provide information on House Bill 542. Center for Hope provides intervention and prevention for: child abuse, domestic violence, community violence, and elder justice for survivors, caregivers, and communities. At LifeBridge Health, we recognize the devastating impact of violence in our communities, and the growing number of victims of all ages. This is a public health issue and we need to help our communities by partnering with the people in them, to break the cycle of violence. We need to partner alongside community leaders, stand shoulder to shoulder with parents and caregivers, and help provide survivors of violence and crime with support and healing, in order to grow a collective hope for a better city and a better world.

At Center for Hope's medical suite, we see children of all ages from Baltimore City and County coming in for initial health visits within five days of removal and entry into foster care. We are so grateful to Comfort Cases and the ability to be able to give each child a bag full of toiletries, hygiene products, new clean pajamas, socks, and comfort items like a stuffed animal, blanket, and a book. Each child is so thankful to receive a bag for their items. Many little ones are excited to tell us what they are going to put inside their bag and show off wearing their new backpack. Several teens have stated they can't wait to use this bag for their items instead of using their school backpack. Other children are just so excited and appreciative to have items they can call their own.

We have seen so many children that had just had their lives flipped upside down and are living with complete strangers to them. Many teens living in hotels with one-to-one mentors while workers are attempting to find placements for them. So many of these children don't have a bag big enough to grab shoes, underwear, medications, etc. and they come to us for medical exams not wearing any underwear. Many children were not able to bring anything at all with them except for the clothes on their back.

By supporting this bill, you are giving these children and teens a chance to feel human. Children and teens that have been through this traumatic event don't need their lives to be any harder than it already is. By giving each child a bag to carry their belongings from location to location you are treating them like a human, like someone that is important enough to be cared for.

For all the above stated reasons, we request a Favorable report for House Bill 542.

For more information, please contact:

Adam Rosenberg, Esq.

Executive Director, Center for Hope

Vice President, Violence Intervention & Prevention, LifeBridge Health

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**HB0542 CPMC FAV.pdf**

Uploaded by: Diana Philip

Position: FAV

## 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.<sup>1</sup> **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.**

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<sup>1</sup> 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)

**Maryland Catholic Conference\_FAV\_HB542.pdf**

Uploaded by: Diane Arias

Position: FAV



MARYLAND  
CATHOLIC  
CONFERENCE

February 15, 2024

**House Bill 542**  
**Department of Human Services – Children in Foster Care – Luggage**  
**House Judiciary Committee**

**Position: Favorable**

The Maryland Catholic Conference (MCC) is the public policy representative of the three (arch)dioceses serving Maryland, which together encompass over one million Marylanders. Statewide, their parishes, schools, hospitals, and numerous charities combine to form our state’s second largest social service provider network, behind only our state government.

**House Bill 542** requires then Maryland Department of Human Services to establish and maintain a decentralized supply of new luggage to be used to transport the personal belongings of child in foster care; requiring the Department to provide new luggage to a child who is being removed from a household under certain circumstances; requiring the Department to maintain certain records regarding luggage and children in foster care.

Some of our nation’s most vulnerable youth are in foster care, with 4,237 children in foster care in Maryland as of 2022.<sup>1</sup> These children are placed in foster care for various reasons such as abandonment, death, incarceration, neglect, abuse, and voluntary placement. Foster care aims to provide a safe environment for children to live and grow. However, many children in foster care lack basic belongings. When moving between homes, their belongings are often packed in plastic trash bags, which diminishes their sense of worth. Providing foster children with their own luggage is essential for their well-being. It offers them a sense of dignity and value, showing them that they are not disposable. As Pope Francis noted, “every child is God’s gift, in every case, and in whatever situation.”<sup>2</sup> With their own luggage, foster children can have a constant and personal belonging, easing the transitions between homes. This bill aims to provide dignity and hope to foster youth, emphasizing their inherent value and importance in our communities.

For these reasons, the MCC asks for a favorable report on **HB 542**.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.adoptuskids.org/adoption-and-foster-care/how-to-adopt-and-foster/state-information/maryland#:~:text=As%20of%202022%2C%20there%20are,of%2Dhome%20care%20in%20Maryland.>

<sup>2</sup> <https://gulfcatholic.org/pope-francis-adoption-every-child-arrives-gods-gift>

Thank you for your consideration.

**HB0542- Maryland Legal Aid - FAV 240213 with photo**

Uploaded by: Erica LeMon

Position: FAV





**MARYLAND  
LEGAL AID**

*Advancing*  
**Human Rights and  
Justice for All**

**HB0542 - Department of Human Services - Children in Foster Care - Luggage**

Hearing before the House Judiciary Committee,

Feb. 15, 2024

**Position: FAVORABLE**

*Maryland Legal Aid (MLA) submits its written and oral testimony on HB0542 at the request of bill sponsor Delegate Joe Vogel.*

MLA is a non-profit law firm that provides free legal services to the State's low-income and vulnerable residents. We serve residents in each of Maryland's 24 jurisdictions and handle a range of civil legal matters. MLA is Maryland's largest civil non-profit law firm, representing vulnerable young people in Child in Need of Assistance (CINA) matters across the State of Maryland. HB0542 is a vital measure to ensure that children who have been removed from their homes receive new luggage to be used to transport their personal belongings. MLA urges the Committee's favorable report on HB0542.

HB542 will help ensure dignity and humanity for the Children in Need of Assistance in Maryland, by ensuring that their belongings are transported in luggage. This would prevent the use of trash bags which have been used for many children in foster care. When a child who has been determined to be a Child in Need of Assistance is removed from their household, it can be traumatizing. The youth must adapt to a new placement, and possibly a new school. For many of our Children in Need of Assistance, they have been abused and/or neglected and come from backgrounds of instability and therefore understandably often do not feel valued.

In some unfortunate cases, insult is added to injury when their valued personal belongings are stuffed in trash bags. This is degrading to the youth and can undermine their self-worth. This bill will provide these youth with the dignity of bringing their belongings in new luggage.

Maryland Legal Aid has represented several Children in Need of Assistance recently who have had to move to new placements with their clothes shoved in plastics bags. We have attached a photo of a recent client's items stuffed into trash bags. When we put a youth's personal items in trash bags, it sends a direct message that their items are not valued or important and by extension they are not valued or important.

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Some counties currently work with charities that provide luggage and backpacks, but others are not so fortunate. Every Child in Need of Assistance in the state of Maryland deserves to have the minimum dignity that this bill will provide.

**Maryland Legal Aid urges the Committee to issue a FAVORABLE report on House Bill 542 and urge its ultimate passage.** If you have any questions, please contact: Erica I. LeMon, Director of Advocacy for Children's Rights at [elemon@mdlabor.org](mailto:elemon@mdlabor.org) (410) 951-7648 or (410) 935-0937.



Photo of items belonging to a foster child placed in trash bags for transport.

# **CFH response.pdf**

Uploaded by: Jessica Ciarapica

Position: FAV

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# **HB542 Foster Care Luggage JVR Testimony.pdf**

Uploaded by: Joe Vogel

Position: FAV

**JOE VOGEL**  
Legislative District 17  
Montgomery County

Ways and Means Committee

*Subcommittees*

Education

Revenues



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**THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES**  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

**HB542: Department of Human Services - Children in Foster Care - Luggage**

House Judiciary Committee

Thursday, February 15, 2024 1:00PM

Chair Clippinger, Madam Vice Chair Bartlett, and Members of the House Judiciary Committee:

No child in Maryland should be forced to carry around their belongings in a trash bag. Children in the foster care system experience hardships that those who have not been in foster care cannot relate to. For example, children in foster care are subject to relocations from one household to another, during which they must collect all of their belongings to bring with them to their new home.

This process can be unnerving for children who may already feel vulnerable and isolated. To compound this, children are often given *trash bags* for the purpose of moving their belongings. This current standard is inhumane, and does not reflect the fundamental dignity that every individual deserves.

HB542 would require the Department of Human services to create and manage a decentralized supply of new luggage to be utilized by children experiencing foster care to transport their belongings. The department may solicit and accept grants, gifts, and donations of any kind to meet this requirement. Furthermore, the Department must report to the General Assembly the number of instances in which a child was provided a plastic bag, and the reason why they failed to provide new luggage. Under this bill, children are to be given new luggage once, not every time they are relocated, and luggage provided is theirs to keep.

It is essential that we end the shameful practice of providing trash bags for children in foster care to move their belongings. It is imperative that those experiencing foster care feel supported and are afforded the dignity that we would expect for our own children.

**I urge the committee to give a favorable report on HB542.**

# **NASW Maryland - 2024 HB 542 FAV - Foster Care and**

Uploaded by: Karessa Proctor

Position: FAV



**Testimony before the House Judiciary Committee  
February 15, 2024**

**House Bill 542: Department of Human Services -  
Children in Foster Care - Luggage  
\*\*Support\*\***

The National Association of Social Workers – MD Chapter is the professional organization representing over 3,000 social workers statewide. We are asking for your support for HB 542, which would require the Department of Human Services (DHS) to establish and maintain a supply of new luggage to be used to transport the personal belongings of a child in foster care; require DHS to provide new luggage to a child who is being removed from a household under certain circumstances; and require DHS to maintain certain records regarding luggage and children in foster care.

Ensuring that children separated from their parents as a result of maltreatment or moving placement have luggage to transport their possessions is a no-brainer, and easy to support. Little is more demeaning than being forced to carry one's worldly possessions in a trash bag.

From querying social workers, we were encouraged to learn that DHS's foster parent policy already requires the purchase of luggage, and that local departments have purchased new luggage for years using a variety of funds. We also learned that in the 21 years of DHS's sibling sleepaway camp, Camp Connect, no camper has ever attended without luggage. Nonetheless, centralizing the purchase makes sense and can reasonably assure equitable access across the state without regard to the local department's resources.

With respect to the reporting requirements, we appreciate the keen interest in information about the number of instances when a disposable bag may have been used, and the reason the Department failed to provide new luggage. However, given the hundreds of existing requirements for documentation in an area of human services in which it's relationships that make the difference, not paperwork, social workers offered a cautionary note that a strategy for adding the collection of data from caseworkers about luggage may be a challenge.

*(over)*

Moreover, in light of children in the state's legal custody with literally nowhere to go – children and youth in hospitals on overstay and in hotels with 1:1 at a cost of roughly \$40,000 to \$60,000 month per child - social workers were hopeful that there might be as much concern about a place for the children to go as there is about luggage to bring with them.

In summary, maltreated children and youth who are separated from their parents and in the state's custody are entitled to the best possible care. As a sign in a colleague's office read, "If we are doing things to a child we wouldn't do with our own, we need to stop and ask ourselves why." While we have some significant progress to be made on supportive and therapeutic places for our children and youth to live, we can at least be sure their belongings aren't carried in trash bags.

Karessa Proctor, BSW, MSW  
Executive Director, NASW-MD

**HB542\_MARFY\_FAV.pdf**

Uploaded by: Tyahna Arnold

Position: FAV



**February 15, 2024**

**Department of Human Services-Children in Foster Care-Luggage  
House Bill 542**

**Position: SUPPORT**

The Maryland Association of Resources for Families and Youth (MARFY) is an association of private child caring organizations providing foster care, group homes, and other services through more than 200 programs across Maryland. The members of MARFY represent providers who serve Maryland's most vulnerable children who are in out of home placements due to abuse, neglect or severe mental health, and medical needs. We operate group homes, treatment foster care programs and independent living programs, primarily serving the foster care population as well as a juvenile services population.

House Bill 542 presents a crucial opportunity to address a fundamental issue affecting the dignity and self-worth of foster children: the provision of new luggage. For too long, many children in foster care have been forced to carry their belongings in trash bags during transitions between placements. This practice not only perpetuates feelings of shame and inadequacy but also undermines their sense of self-worth and dignity.

Passing this legislation would signify a powerful statement to these children, affirming that they are valued members of our community deserving of respect and consideration. By ensuring that each child receives brand-new luggage, we send a clear message that they are worthy of care and attention, regardless of their past experiences or circumstances.

It is imperative to recognize the profound impact that trauma, instability, and loss can have on a child's psyche. Providing them with their own new belongings, including luggage, serves as a tangible symbol of hope and renewal—a fresh start unencumbered by the shadows of their past. Every child deserves the opportunity to move forward with dignity and pride, unencumbered by the baggage of their past experiences.

MARFY stands firmly in support of House Bill 542, as it aligns with our core mission of advocating for the well-being of foster youth. By addressing this

seemingly simple yet profoundly meaningful issue, we can make a tangible difference in the lives of countless children, empowering them to navigate the challenges of the foster care system with a renewed sense of worth and purpose.

Furthermore, the passage of this legislation would not only benefit the individual children it serves but also contribute to a more efficient and humane placement process overall. Ensuring that each child is equipped with the tools they need for success is essential to safeguarding their well-being and fostering a sense of stability and security.

In conclusion, we urge you to support House Bill 542 and to recognize the importance of providing foster children with brand-new luggage. By doing so, we affirm our commitment to upholding the dignity and worth of every child in our care, and we take a meaningful step towards creating a more compassionate and inclusive foster care system for all. **It is for these reasons we politely ask for a favorable report on House Bill 542.**

**For more information call or email:**

Therese M. Hessler | 301-503-2576 | [therese@ashlargr.com](mailto:therese@ashlargr.com)