



Maryland
Hospital Association

February 20, 2024

To: The Honorable William C. Smith Jr., Chair, Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

Re: Letter of Support- Senate Bill 708- Family Law- Kinship Care

Dear Chair Smith:

On behalf of the Maryland Hospital Association's (MHA) member hospitals and health systems, we appreciate the opportunity to comment in support of Senate Bill 708.

In 2022, MHA conducted a three-month study and found on any given day, there are an average of 48 youth in Maryland hospitals who are in an overstay status—meaning they are either in a hospital emergency department longer than 24 hours or an inpatient unit beyond medical necessity.

The top reasons for the overstays were:

1. Accepted but waiting for behavioral health bed to become available
2. No available placement
3. Aggressive behaviors
4. Diagnosed development disabilities and/or autism

Over the course of the study, 70% of the youth were between 13 and 17 years old, and 30% were involved with the Department of Social Services. Half of the youth were from Baltimore County, Baltimore City, or Montgomery County.

Although not a silver bullet, Maryland hospitals appreciate the Department's proactive, upstream steps to expand the state's kinship care program. SB 708 would add a definition of kinship caregiver to replace "kinship parent," which offers a broader group of trusted adults in a youth's life who can provide a positive, safe, and caring home. Research has shown kinship to be effective in reducing the impact of trauma, improving mental health outcomes, reducing occurrence of behavioral problems, improving social and educational outcomes, and achieving greater placement stability and permanency.^{1,2}

Proactive solutions, like SB 708, are needed to address the growing number of youth who become "stuck" in Maryland hospitals waiting for the next level of care, a return back to a group home, placement in foster care, etc. It's time to stop the wait and engage in forward thinking actions that truly put the needs of Maryland's youth first. SB 708 does this by allowing youth to stay with a caring adult and prioritizing important factors such as proximity of

¹ [Benefits of Kinship Placement \(americanbar.org\)](https://americanbar.org)

² [Needs of Kinship Care Families and Pediatric Practice | Pediatrics | American Academy of Pediatrics \(aap.org\)](https://www.aap.org)

the placement to the child's home of origin, extended family and siblings, in addition to ensuring continuity of any specific cultural or linguistic needs.

More work needs to be done to improve the situation for Maryland's youth, but legislation like SB 708 will move the state in the right direction.

For these reasons, we request a *favorable* report on SB 708.

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