



*Advocates for Children and Youth is a statewide non-profit focused on improving the lives and experiences of Maryland's children through policy change and program improvement. We champion solutions to child welfare, education, health, and juvenile justice issues, positioning us to influence the full spectrum of youth experiences. This multi-issue platform helps us to improve the entirety of children's worlds—the systems they touch, the people they interact with, and the environment where they live.*

## **Testimony before the Judicial Proceedings Committee**

**In SUPPORT of**

**Senate Bill 77- Human Resources - Transition Planning for Foster Youth**

**Melissa Rock, Child Welfare Director, Advocates for Children and Youth**

**January 27, 2016**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on Senate Bill 77– Human Resources- Transition Planning for Foster Youth. Advocates for Children and Youth (ACY) supports this bill.

Youth with child abuse and neglect cases can remain in Maryland's child welfare system until they turn 21. We don't have any data about how these young people fare once they turn 21, but data from other states indicates tragically negative outcomes for former foster youth. In the largest study of youth leaving foster care, 50% of the foster youth reported experiencing homelessness as an adult.<sup>1</sup> It is essential that the Local Departments of Social Services (LDSS) help give these young people the tools they need to be successful adults. Currently, Maryland's statute only allows the court to order the LDSS to start transition planning when a foster youth is 16 or older. Senate Bill 77 allows this preparation to begin at age 14.

In September 2014, Congress passed the Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act (P.L. 113-183/HR 4980), which is aimed at improving permanency outcomes for foster youth to prevent them from becoming victims of sex trafficking. This federal law requires that states start transition planning with foster youth at age 14, so SB 77 brings Maryland's laws into compliance with this new Federal law.

There is no publicly available data about the ages of children in Maryland's foster care system, however, in the last calendar year, 488 youth aged out of foster care to live on their own.<sup>2</sup> **We urge this Committee to issue a favorable report on Senate Bill 77 to ensure that we begin planning for foster youth's exit from foster care early enough to improve their transition to adulthood.**

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<sup>1</sup> "Midwest evaluation of the adult functioning of former foster youth: Outcomes at age 26." Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago, p. 12.

<sup>2</sup> Maryland Department of Human Resources, Social Services Administration, Child Welfare Data (November 2015).

