Advocates for Children and Youth believes that Maryland’s children are the greatest gift it can give to the future. For this reason, our mission is to build a strong Maryland by advancing policies and programs to ensure children of every race, ethnicity, and place of birth achieve their full potential.

We gather and analyze data to understand the scope of inequities that our children and youth face. We are continuously invited into communities to get a proximate view by folks who experience inequities and negative policy outcomes the most. Oftentimes, these inequities have far reaching effects as they are caused by issues that interconnect and intersect. Therefore, our advocacy will reflect this reality and allow us to effectively address these issues as we introduce and support policies that ensure that every young person in the State has equitable access to resources and opportunities they need to thrive. Hence our theme, Equity for All Kids.

WHY ADVOCATES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH MATTERS:
We are the only statewide child advocacy organization that works to effectively address multiple interconnecting and intersecting issues through a racial equity lens. We will continue to do so in Maryland's 2020 General Assembly as we focus on legislation that promotes the following:

- **FAIR, UNBIASED TREATMENT**
  We will push for equitable treatment of all children and provide them with an opportunity to rebound.

- **ACADEMICALLY PREPARED YOUTH**
  We will advocate to ensure that all young people get the resources, education and supports they need to thrive.

- **POSITIVE LIFE EXPERIENCES**
  We will advocate for keeping childhood a positive experience as we address trauma and the fulfillment of the basic needs in life.

- **HEALTHY KIDS, FAMILIES, COMMUNITIES**
  We will push for policy and programs that support healthy and safe living, learning and working environments in all communities.
We will advocate to ensure that all young people get the resources, education and supports they need to thrive.

Preparing Students for Life: Understanding the Whole Child

Advocates for Children and Youth recognizes that truly transformational education policy change must take into account that students are more than pupils—they are whole human beings with complex needs, underutilized assets, and limitless potential.

As such, our education advocacy will be intersectional and interconnected, allowing us to more effectively champion issues that impact students’ non-academic experiences in Maryland schools—including but not limited to the establishment of high-quality, full-service school-based health centers, youth employment/entrepreneurship opportunities, behavioral and mental health services, first generation American and first generation college-going supports, and solutions which will address the unique needs of students who are expectant and/or current parents.

Next Steps: Advocates for Children and Youth will support reforms that address these issues.

Giving Students Resources: Equitable, Full Public Education Funding

Maryland’s schools are underfunded by $2.9 billion annually—an average of $2 million per school per year. There are 1.3 million people under the age of 18 in Maryland and its public schools welcome nearly 900,000 of them. It is imperative that public schools are resourced adequately enough to meet the more diverse, complex needs students come to school with AND that resources are distributed equitably so all students can achieve at their highest potential.

Impact: Over the last five years, Maryland has made no progress on addressing the issue of children living in concentrated poverty—in fact, 9,000 more children lived like this in 2017 than did in 2012. Children living in concentrated poverty will need more supports and often these needs show up in our schools.

Need for legislation: Giving all students the resources they need to maximize their potential within the pre K to 12 (and post-secondary) educational system.

What the legislation will do: The law will adopt the Kirwan Commission’s recommendations and update the education funding formula to be adequate, equitable, and accompanied by a dedicated revenue stream. This action will give all students the resources they need to maximize their potential within the pre K to 12 (and post-secondary) educational system.

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Levelling the Field: Creating Standardized Graduation Requirements

Children in Maryland’s foster care system are regularly bounced from placement to placement and from school to school. **On average youth in the custody of Maryland’s Department of Human Services move on average of 5 times every 1000 days.** These constant transitions often result in a loss of school credits, academic problems, and a delay in earning a high school diploma.

**Impact:** In Maryland, during the 2017 academic school year, 23 percent of high school youth experiencing foster care and homelessness attended two schools and 7 percent attended 3 or more. **Youth in out-of-home care lose approximately 4-6 months of academic progress with each change in school placement and are 50 percent more likely not to graduate from high school even with just one school placement.**

**Need for legislation:** Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) sets minimum high school graduation standards for the state’s school districts, yet allows school districts flexibility with regard to additional coursework pupils are required to complete to graduate from high school.

**What the legislation will do:** In order to reduce the educational barriers faced by youth experiencing foster care and homelessness, Advocates for Children and Youth is in support of **a law that will standardize graduation requirements throughout Maryland and increase the opportunity for youth to graduate.**

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