

HB 915 – Workgroup on Aging Out of Foster Care

House Appropriations Committee

March 19, 2026

Position: FAVORABLE

Mental Health Association of Maryland (MHAMD) is a nonprofit education and advocacy organization that brings together consumers, families, clinicians, advocates and concerned citizens for unified action in all aspects of mental health and substance use disorders (collectively referred to as behavioral health). We appreciate the opportunity to provide this testimony in support of HB 915.

HB 915 would establish a workgroup to study and make recommendations on how Maryland can better support youth aging out of foster care.

Unfortunately, some youth who enter foster care never achieve reunification with their birth families. Nor are they adopted by another family. In these cases, a youth is said to age out of foster care, and they are likely to face significant challenges that impact their life course.

Youth who age out of foster care are more likely than their peers to have behavioral, mental and physical health issues. They are more likely to experience housing instability, joblessness, academic difficulties, early parenthood, and substance use.¹ In Maryland in 2023, 12% of those children who exited foster care aged out of foster care (171 youth), which is four percentage points higher than the national average.²

These young adults need a robust system of supports to help them overcome some of the many challenges they face and achieve what comes more easily to young adults who have the support of a family. Maryland has done much over the years to help young adult aging out of foster care, including implementing extended foster care to age 21, developing independent living programs, and providing funding for continuing education. There are other programs that have been adopted in other states that Maryland could look to, such as establishing navigators to help youth access an array of public benefits, including those that are uniquely available to youth aging out of foster care, wraparound services, and matching savings programs.

While Maryland has done much, there is more we could do to improve outcomes for youth aging out of foster care, therefore we urge a favorable report.

¹ Annie E. Casey Foundation. What Happens to Youth Aging Out of Foster Care (November, 2025). <https://www.aecf.org/blog/what-happens-to-youth-aging-out-of-foster-care>

² Annie E, Casey Foundation. Kids County Data Center (2023). <https://datacenter.aecf.org/data/tables/6277-children-exiting-foster-care-by-exit-reason?loc=1&loct=1#detailed/2/2-53/true/2545/2632/13050,13051>