

**CITY OF BALTIMORE
COUNCIL BILL 05-0070R
(Resolution)**

Introduced by: President Dixon, Councilmembers Holton, Branch, Kraft, Young, Harris, Curran,
Conaway, Reisinger, Welch, Mitchell, Clarke
Introduced and read first time: July 11, 2005
Assigned to: Committee of the Whole

Committee Report: Favorable
Adopted: April 4, 2006

A COUNCIL RESOLUTION CONCERNING

Joint Investigative Hearing – Baltimore City Children in Foster Care

FOR the purpose of requesting the Chairs and Members of the Baltimore City Senate and House Delegations to the 2006 Maryland General Assembly to come together with the Members of the Baltimore City Council to hold a joint investigative hearing to explore the systemic problems in the Baltimore City Department of Social Services that led to the current crisis in the care of emotionally fragile youth and to identify corrective fiscal, administrative, and personnel-related interventions to insure that our most vulnerable children are provided adequate and appropriate care.

Recitals

Recently, the media highlighted the alarming condition of Baltimore City's foster care system when it reported that children who should have been cared for in a loving and nurturing environment were instead spending nights in a downtown Baltimore City Department of Social Services' office building and spending days anywhere but in the classrooms where they should have been receiving an education.

Child advocates were scandalized that perhaps dozens of children were housed in a waiting room in the building on Gay Street night after night, with no access to showers, personal grooming necessities, or blankets. While the boys spent the night upright in hard plastic chairs, some of the girls slept on thin mats on the floor. Staff watched over the children and provided them with fast-food meals. The children did not attend school.

The Director of the agency acknowledged that it was a violation of State law to allow the children to spend the night at the 24-hour intake center because it is not licensed to provide childcare, but attributes the use of the office as a temporary shelter to 2 factors – service providers who refuse to take in troubled foster care children and foster care children who have figured out that they can go to the office for free food and other services rather than go to a more restrictive facility from which they are unable to freely walk away.

At the same time this problem has come to light, the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee is holding hearings regarding the oversight of homes for abandoned, abused, delinquent, and medically fragile children. Part of the focus is on the recommendation of advocacy groups to place responsibility for the monitoring of conditions in these group homes with a single agency,

EXPLANATION: Underlining indicates matter added by amendment.
~~Strike out~~ indicates matter stricken by amendment.

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1 instead of the 4 State agencies that are currently involved. The Departments of Human
2 Resources, Health and Mental Hygiene, and Juvenile Services license and monitor their affiliated
3 group homes, while the Department of Education determines the rates of reimbursement for care.

4 During the 1st of 3 hearings scheduled by the Committee, Senators decried the State’s
5 oversight of privately run group homes for troubled youths as a “disaster” that has existed for at
6 least a decade. In these State-funded homes, an unconscionable number of the 2700 emotionally,
7 psychiatrically, and medically frail youth in the system were being mistreated or neglected by
8 under trained and unqualified staff, some with criminal backgrounds.

9 With such horrendous conditions in the groups homes where these youth would most likely
10 end up, or be returned to, it is no surprise that they would rather spend their time in the
11 uncomfortable and comfortless waiting room of a cold office building. We have to make sure
12 that a safe and nurturing environment is in place to shelter these kids who need a safe haven
13 from the stark realities that have far too soon become a part of their young lives.

14 **NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF BALTIMORE,** That the
15 Chairs and Members of the Baltimore City Senate and House Delegations to the 2006 Maryland
16 General Assembly are requested to come together with the Members of the Baltimore City
17 Council to hold a joint investigative hearing to explore the systemic problems in the Baltimore
18 City Department of Social Services that led to the current crisis in the care of emotionally fragile
19 youth and to identify corrective fiscal, administrative, and personnel-related interventions to
20 insure that our most vulnerable children are provided adequate and appropriate care.

21 **AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED,** That the findings of the joint legislative hearing will be
22 submitted to the Governor and the Mayor, with requests for appropriate action no later than 2
23 weeks following the date of the hearing.

24 **AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED,** That a copy of this Resolution be sent to the Governor; the
25 Chairs and Members of the Baltimore City Senate and House Delegations to the 2006 Maryland
26 General Assembly; the Mayor; the Secretary, Maryland Department of Human Resources; the
27 Director, Baltimore City Department of Human Resources; the Chief Attorney, Baltimore Child
28 Advocacy Unit at the Maryland Legal Aid Bureau; the Administrator, Citizens Review Board for
29 Children; the Executive Director, Advocates for Children and Youth; the Director, Governor’s
30 Office of Children for Children, Youth, and Families; the Managing Attorney, the Maryland
31 Disability Law Center; the Executive Director, the Mayor’s Office for Children, Youth, and
32 Families; and the Mayor’s Legislative Liaison to the City Council.