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Director

**State of Maryland
Juvenile Justice Monitoring Unit**

**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 1514
MARYLAND WHISTLEBLOWER LAW- DJS EMPLOYEES**

Appropriations Committee
March 12, 2020

Submitted by Nick Moroney, Juvenile Justice Monitoring Unit (JJMU)

The Juvenile Justice Monitoring Unit (JJMU) supports HB 1514, which would protect employees of the Department of Juvenile Services (DJS) from retaliation for providing information to the JJMU concerning the welfare of young people incarcerated in DJS facilities and would require DJS to provide its employees with written notification of such protection.

HB 1514 would clarify to DJS employees that they can share with the JJMU any concerns about issues affecting children under their care. Open communication between staff and monitors about youth welfare will assist the unit in assessing youth safety and youth needs and aid us in our efforts to collaboratively work with DJS officials to improve conditions for youth in DJS facilities. Information shared to monitors from DJS staff concerning conditions of youth confinement will enhance the ability of the unit to fulfill its statutory mandate to evaluate, among other factors, the treatment of and services to youth, the physical conditions of the facility, and the adequacy of staffing.

Open communication between DJS staff and JJMU monitors can lead to a safer and more secure environment for both youth and staff. Facility culture varies based on leadership styles. At facilities with a top-down management style, front-line workers may share information related to facility safety and security with monitors that they are uncomfortable sharing to facility administrators. JJMU monitors are well-positioned to help resolve safety and security concerns as they debrief with facility administrators after every visit and have regular contact with agency leadership.

The requirement for written notification concerning the protection from retaliation would place administrators on notice that they cannot treat employees negatively for talking to monitors about issues concerning youth in their facilities. At times DJS employees have indicated to monitors that they are reluctant to share information because they have (1) been told by managers that they should not engage with monitors during monitoring visits, (2) been interrogated about conversations with monitors following visits, and/or (3) been treated more harshly following conversations with monitors. HB 1514 would help ensure these practices are discontinued.

For these reasons, the JJMU supports HB 1514 and respectfully urges the committee to give the bill a favorable report.