



March 7, 2024

House Bill 1136 - Human Services - Youth Services Bureaus – Funding
House Appropriation Committee
Favorable

Dear Chair Barnes, Vice Chair Chang, and members of the Appropriations Committee,

The Maryland Youth Justice Coalition supports House Bill 1136 - Human Services - Youth Services Bureaus - Funding (Youth Services Bureau Restoration Act). MYJC represents a diverse array of local, state and national organizations; we aim to work towards a Maryland dedicated to preventing children and adolescents from becoming involved in the legal system, upholding the highest standards of care when youth do enter the legal system, and ensuring a platform for system-involved youth and their families to be heard. MYJC strives for a Maryland where no children are at risk of system involvement and, if they are involved with the legal system, they and their families receive every possible opportunity to define and live safe, healthy and fulfilling lives through restorative practices supported by our state and local communities.

MYJC supports HB1136 because it fills a serious gap in services for youth in need of support. Under the prior administration, YSBs were defunded at a significant rate, forcing many YSBs to close. A strong network of service providers, particularly those like YSBs that keep kids from entering the juvenile justice system, are critical to providing kids with the age-appropriate support they need to be successful. We know, from 20 years of data and research, that services are the most effective approach to keeping kids from entering the justice system, and treating those that have had contact with the justice system. We also know that what's best for kids, is best for everyone. Services, not incarceration, make our communities safer.

Maryland's Youth Service Bureaus (YSBs) have provided effective interventions to children and their families for decades. Mandating state funding of \$4.8 million in FY 2026 would allow for the re-establishment of YSBs closed in recent years, and the strengthening of existing YSBs.

Their success is evident:

- 95% of youth served in formal counseling do not enter the juvenile justice system 2 years after ending counseling (as measured by the Department of Juvenile Service);
- 80% of youth assessed by YSBs in Maryland showed significant improvement, compared to the 60% national standard (as measured by the empirically-based Child and Adolescent Functional Assessment Scale); and
- YSBs are also cost effective as every \$1 invested by the State leverages an additional \$8 in services.

The network of YSBs has built strong, long-standing partnerships with local schools, faith-based organizations, and local government agencies to enhance the health, safety and well-being of Maryland's children, youth and families. The success can be attributed to their prevention programs, family-focused

interventions, and behavioral health counseling. A majority of young people coming into YSBs are referred for mental health services and the age of children the YSBs serve is getting younger. The pandemic has also added to the complexity of cases, and the demand for mental health services.

HB 1136 would increase the wrap-around and preventative services desperately needed to address spiking incidents of gun violence involving teens, including the increase in the number of juvenile victims of homicide and nonfatal shootings. The services are proven to work in keeping young people out of the criminal justice system. After several years of continual budget reductions, we support the call in HB 1136 to restore funding and increase the reach of these proven-effective services.

We urge a favorable report on HB 1136. For more information on the data and research supporting services for youth, please see MYJC's report [*What's Best for Kids is Best for Everyone*](#).