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THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

February 22, 2024

The Maryland State Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
The Honorable William C. Smith, Jr.
2 East Miller Senate Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Re: Senate Bill 636: *Juvenile Law – Commission to Study the Ability of the Department of Juvenile Services to Provide Effective Social Services to Juvenile Offenders*

Dear Chairman Smith and Members of the Committee,

This is perhaps my most important bill of the session because of the imperative short and long-term impact it could have.

As we're all aware of by now, both chambers of the General Assembly and the Governor have signaled their intention to make juvenile justice a top priority this session. Regardless of on which side one may fall on the policy issues presented by the various juvenile bills pending before us, I think we all agree that it is absolutely essential that the State of Maryland be in a position to provide effective treatment services to juveniles who have gotten themselves in trouble. Accountability and effective treatment for juveniles who are committing crimes is imperative. But repeated testimony that we have received confirms that this is not occurring at present. For example, this Committee has received reports that one youthful offender after another has received no treatment services because "there are no slots available". Such a situation is intolerable. To get to the bottom of this problem and to solve it, I present to the Committee Senate Bill 636.

If passed, this bill will establish a commission to study how effectively the Department of Juvenile Services can provide social services to juvenile offenders. The commission will be comprised of a member of a Maryland State Senate appointed by the chair of this Committee, a Delegate appointed by the Chair of the House Judiciary Committee, an appointee of the Department of Juvenile Services, an appointee of the Office of the Public Defender, an appointee of the Maryland State's Attorney's Association, an appointee of the State Police, and an appointee of the Attorney General.

The best way for me to describe the mission of the proposed commission is to simply read to you the mission statement contained in the bill:

The Commission shall: (1) review and assess the efficiency and effectiveness of the policies and practices of the Department of Juvenile Services relating to: (i) the supervision and monitoring

of juvenile offenders; (ii) treatment programs; (iii) intervention and prevention services; (iv) rehabilitative services; (v) community supervision; and (vi) mental health services provided to juvenile offenders; (2) consider available evidence-based assessments of Department of Juvenile Services programs; (3) develop data relating to the number of juvenile offenders and the length and frequency of juvenile participation; (4) investigate the effectiveness of Department of Juvenile Services programs and services aimed at juvenile offenders; (5) assess the total cost associated with Department of Juvenile Services programs and services within the last 5 fiscal years; (6) make recommendations regarding improvements to the Department of Juvenile Services residential programs; (7) assess and make recommendations regarding the ability of the Department of Juvenile Services to provide social services to juvenile offenders; and (8) make recommendations regarding budgetary appropriations to sustain and improve Department of Juvenile Services programs and services.

Upon reviewing the draft bill prior to this hearing, I realized that an amendment is needed. Currently, the bill requires the commission to render its final report by December 1, 2025 and provides that the commission will sunset on December 31, 2024. Obviously, that timing doesn't work. The amendment will provide that the commission's final report will be due by December 31, 2024 and that the commission will sunset on June 30, 2025. It is vital that this Committee have the commission's work product in hand at the end of this calendar year so appropriate implementing legislation can be enacted in next year's session.

The ultimate goal of all the juvenile bills before the General Assembly this session is to reduce crime, but it will be in vain if we do not have the tools to ensure that juveniles do not become repeat offenders.

I appreciate the Committee's consideration of Senate Bill 636 and will be happy to answer any questions the Committee may have.