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**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 855: JUVENILE LAW – RESTRICTIVE HOUSING -  
LIMITATIONS**

***House Judiciary Committee***

**February 22, 2024**

**Submitted by Nick Moroney, Director, Juvenile Justice Monitoring Unit**

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**The Juvenile Justice Monitoring Unit of the Office of the Attorney General (JJMU OAG) supports HB 855** which, if passed, will place limits on the use of restrictive housing on children and young people held in correctional facilities.

The JJMU OAG was established in the wake of widespread systemic abuse issues in the Maryland juvenile justice system. Unit monitors perform unannounced visits to Maryland Department of Juvenile Services' (DJS') operated facilities to guard against abuse of incarcerated young people and ensure that they receive appropriate treatment and services. (Our public reports can be accessed via the following link: <https://www.marylandattorneygeneral.gov/pages/jjm/default.aspx>).

The proposed legislation is necessary and will benefit incarcerated young people. While DJS policy limits the circumstances and length of time under which separation of a young person from the general population can be used, and mandates medical and mental health services involvement and ongoing documentation of the situation, this departmental policy is not enshrined in statute.

Young people held in non-DJS operated facilities such as local detention centers, jails and prisons are especially in need of the protections proposed in this bill. Use of restrictive housing in prisons and jails further compounds the inherent trauma of incarceration, and the deleterious effect of this practice is particularly harmful to young people. Most of the young people in the juvenile and criminal justice system have been exposed to violence, and justice-involved youth have a high prevalence of traumatic stress and mental health disorders. The utilization of restrictive housing in correctional settings has been shown to both cause acute

mental health problems and exacerbate existing mental health conditions. Furthermore, rather than de-escalate heightened emotions and promote positive behavior, isolation can increase anxiety, agitation and aggressiveness.

In contrast, well-designed intensive and holistic interventions and programming including those that utilize positive behavioral supports, cognitive therapy, and social skills training have been proven to reduce aggressiveness and acting-out behavior and promote positive youth development. HB 855 privileges the use of such programming support over the harmful practice of restrictive housing and will lead to improved safety and better short- and longer-term outcomes for incarcerated young people.

**For all the reasons just given, the JJMU strongly supports this important bill and respectfully urges the committee to give HB 855 a favorable report.**