

House Judiciary Committee

House Bill 1107: Juvenile Law – Confinement and Restrictive Housing – Limitations

Date: February 26, 2025

Position: Support

Disability Rights Maryland (DRM) is Maryland's state-designated Protection and Advocacy organization, empowered under state and federal law to protect individuals with disabilities from abuse, neglect, and civil rights violations. Over the past decade, DRM has advocated for improved conditions for individuals with mental illness and other disabilities in state correctional facilities, particularly those housed in segregation (restrictive housing) units.

Despite prior legislative efforts to ban the use of restrictive housing for juveniles, DRM continues to receive reports of youth—many with disabilities—being placed in restrictive housing when held in adult detention centers due to the legal requirement that they be kept outside the sight and sound of adult inmates. While this requirement is essential to ensuring the safety of youth, the reality is that many of these juveniles are placed in conditions that amount to solitary confinement while they await transfer to a juvenile detention facility. These transfers can last for days, or even weeks due to scheduling delays or lack of available space in Department of Juvenile Services (DJS) facilities.

DRM agrees with the positions of the National Commission on Correctional Health Care (NCCHC) and the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, which strongly oppose the use of restrictive housing for juveniles. Research has consistently shown that isolating youth for 22 or more hours per day can lead to severe psychological harm, including depression, anxiety, paranoia, suicidal ideation, and exacerbation of existing mental health conditions¹. These harms are particularly concerning given that adolescent brain development is still in progress.

Additionally, DRM has found that mental health services for youth placed in restrictive housing are often inadequate or nonexistent. Many juveniles receive little to no structured out-of-cell programming, leading to prolonged and unnecessary suffering.

¹ American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, Juvenile Justice Reform Committee. Solitary Confinement of Juvenile Offenders (2012).

https://www.aacap.org/aacap/Policy_Statements/2012/Solitary_Confinement_of_Juvenile_Offenders.aspx

HB 1107 is a critical step in ensuring that youth in Maryland's justice system are treated humanely and appropriately. The bill's provisions, including the strict limitations on restrictive housing and requirements for individualized plans to return youth to the general population, provide much-needed protections. Furthermore, we strongly support the provision prohibiting juveniles from being housed in adult correctional facilities, which is developmentally inappropriate and places youth at serious risk.

DRM urges this committee to issue a **favorable report** on HB 1107 to ensure that no youth in Maryland is subjected to the harmful effects of restrictive housing.



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