

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2003 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
Revised

House Bill 817

(Delegate O'Donnell, *et al.*)

Judiciary

Finance

The Task Force to Study Alternative Living Arrangements for Children in Out-of-Home Placement

This bill establishes a 15-member Task Force to Study Alternative Living Arrangements for Children in Out-of-Home Placement. The task force must study and make recommendations regarding: (1) the appropriate and expeditious placement of children in alternative living arrangements; (2) the feasibility of alternative living arrangements that involve wilderness-related activities and require the cooperative efforts of the Department of Natural Resources; (3) the feasibility of coordinating with the Maryland State Department of Education in developing specialized curricula for children in alternative living arrangements; and (4) the need for medical and mental health services and drug and alcohol abuse services among children in alternative living arrangements. The task force must report its findings and recommendations to the Governor and the General Assembly by October 1, 2004. The Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) must provide staff for the task force.

The bill is effective October 1, 2003 and sunsets October 31, 2004.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: Any expense reimbursements for task force members and staffing costs for DJJ could be handled with existing resources.

Local Effect: None.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Current Law: DJJ must provide for the care, diagnosis, training, education, and rehabilitation of children who have been committed to DJJ by placing them in group homes and institutions.

Background: In 1996, a federal law required the U.S. Attorney General to provide Congress with a review of the effectiveness of crime and delinquency prevention strategies that have been funded with federal dollars. The report, *Preventing Crime: What Works, What Doesn't, What's Promising*, was prepared by the University of Maryland Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice and submitted to the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) in July 1998.

The report reviews evaluations of juvenile residential programs and notes that wilderness or outward bound programs were popular during the late 1970s and early 1980s. As defined in the report, wilderness programs “emphasize physical challenges and demand that individuals excel beyond what they feel they can do.” Although some evaluations of residential wilderness programs have reported reductions in youth recidivism rates, the majority have been inconclusive and some have even shown higher recidivism rates among youths who were placed in the programs. The NIJ report also suggests that evaluations of wilderness programs have not used very rigorous experimental designs, and the results, therefore, must be interpreted cautiously.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Department of Juvenile Justice, Department of Natural Resources, Maryland State Department of Education, Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, Department of Legislative Services

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Analysis by: Mark W. Collins

Direct Inquiries to:
(410) 946-5510
(301) 970-5510