

**Department of Legislative Services**  
 Maryland General Assembly  
 2026 Session

**FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE**  
**First Reader**

House Bill 552 (Delegate J. Long, *et al.*)  
 Government, Labor, and Elections

**Independent Investigation of the House of Reformation and Instruction for Colored Children**

This emergency bill establishes the Independent Investigation of the House of Reformation and Instruction for Colored Children (HRICC), facilitated by a Principal Independent Investigator, to (1) investigate the history, operations, and resident deaths at HRICC and (2) provide a complete and public accounting of the children who died and were buried on the grounds of HRICC and the circumstances surrounding their deaths. If the investigation uncovers evidence of criminal conduct, the investigators must refer such evidence to the Attorney General or appropriate State’s Attorney. The principal investigator must report findings and recommendations to the Governor and the General Assembly by December 31, 2028. **The bill terminates June 30, 2029.**

**Fiscal Summary**

**State Effect:** No assumed effect in FY 2026. General fund expenditures increase by \$250,000 annually from FY 2027 through 2029. The FY 2027 budget as introduced includes \$250,000 of related funding, as discussed below. Revenues are not affected.

(in dollars)	FY 2026	FY 2027	FY 2028	FY 2029	FY 2030
Revenues	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
GF Expenditure	0	250,000	250,000	250,000	0
Net Effect	\$0	(\$250,000)	(\$250,000)	(\$250,000)	\$0

*Note: ( ) = decrease; GF = general funds; FF = federal funds; SF = special funds; - = indeterminate increase; (-) = indeterminate decrease*

**Local Effect:** The bill does not materially affect local government operations or finances.

**Small Business Effect:** None.

## Analysis

**Bill Summary:** The independent investigation must be conducted by a principal independent investigator who has significant experience in (1) leading complex criminal or civil investigations; (2) stakeholder and community collaboration; (3) civil rights law; (4) restorative justice; or (5) historical inquiry. The principal independent investigator is to be appointed by the Chairs and ranking members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings and House Judiciary committees. The principal investigator may appoint two deputy independent investigators with specified experience to assist in the operational work. The investigation must:

- use ground-penetrating radar (GPR) and other modern archaeological methods to locate and map all unmarked graves at the site of HRICC;
- determine the total number of individuals buried at the site of HRICC;
- where necessary and appropriate, consistent with best practices and with consultation from descendant communities, conduct the exhumation and forensic analysis of remains to determine age, ancestry, cause of death, and evidence of trauma or neglect;
- collect DNA samples from remains to establish a database for matching with potential descendants;
- review all available records from relevant State or local agencies to identify every child who died at HRICC;
- reconstruct institutional policies, living conditions, labor practices, disciplinary methods, and medical care standards throughout the history of HRICC;
- document all allegations and official findings of abuse, neglect, and mistreatment of residents at HRICC; and
- make recommendations for (1) the establishment of a permanent public memorial; (2) a formal process for the repatriation of identified remains and the dignified reburial of unidentified remains; (3) policy changes to ensure the proper documentation and handling of deaths in State custody; and (4) educational initiatives to incorporate the history of HRICC into the State's curriculum.

The principal investigator may request and receive assistance, information, and documents from any State agency or unit of State government, or any agency or political subdivision of the State. Any agency or unit of government that receives such a request must comply. The bill may not be construed to grant the principal investigator and deputy investigators prosecutorial authority.

*Exemptions From Relevant Laws:* Notwithstanding provisions in Division II of the State Finance and Procurement Article, the principal investigator has the authority to

approve contracts to retain subject matter consultants and entities to meet the needs of the investigation.

Notwithstanding any other provision of law, the principal investigator is authorized to conduct archaeological surveys, test excavations, and carry out the disinterment of human remains on the grounds of HRICC without separate agency permits. The principal investigator must consult with the Maryland Historical Trust and the Maryland Department of Health (MDH) regarding methods and safety for such actions.

Title 17 of the Criminal Procedure Article, which requires a law enforcement officer to submit a sworn affidavit meeting specified criteria for the initiation of a forensic genetic genealogical DNA analysis and search, does not apply to a forensic genealogical DNA analysis and a search conducted by the principal investigator if (1) the search is conducted exclusively for the humanitarian purpose of identifying the deceased and notifying the descendants; (2) biological samples are not used to screen for medical conditions or traits; and (3) all DNA data is destroyed on the conclusion of the investigation.

Notwithstanding § 3-8A-27 of the Courts and Judicial Proceedings Article or the Maryland Public Information Act, the principal investigator and the investigator's designees acting in furtherance of their duties must have full and unrestricted access to all sealed or otherwise confidential juvenile records, medical records, and administrative files related to HRICC. The principal investigator must maintain confidentiality of any living individual mentioned in the records and may disclose the names and circumstances of the deceased individuals for the purposes of the final report of the investigation and memorialization.

**Current Law:** The Department of Juvenile Services (DJS) administers Maryland's juvenile programs. As part of its responsibilities, the department operates several detention facilities throughout the State, including Cheltenham Youth Detention Center, which is the successor facility to HRICC. The recognition of the burial ground at HRICC was publicly announced on July 17, 2025.

**State Fiscal Effect:** General fund expenditures are assumed to increase by \$250,000 annually in fiscal 2027 through 2029. Despite the emergency designation of the bill, this analysis assumes funding is not provided until fiscal 2027. The fiscal 2027 budget as introduced includes \$250,000 for efforts generally related to the HRICC investigation (and is not contingent on the bill). Although the funding is included in the allowance for DJS, this analysis assumes it is made available to the appointed principal investigator to facilitate the independent investigation required under the bill. While this analysis assumes \$250,000 annually, the Department of Legislative Services (DLS) notes that the exact expenditures required to complete the investigation required by the bill are unknown and depend in part on challenges that may arise during the course of the investigation.

DJS also advises that it has received a \$200,000 grant from the African American Heritage Preservation Program to restore the Boy's Village Cemetery in Cheltenham by (1) *using GPR to identify unmarked burials*; (2) through a hired contractor, reset and repair extant grave markers; (3) install fencing around the cemetery's perimeter and erect commemorative signage; and (4) in collaboration with the Department of Military Families, develop a cemetery conservation plan. This available grant funding *may* mitigate some of the expenditures assumed to be incurred by the independent investigation required by the bill.

### *Maryland Department of Health*

MDH operates a Records Management Office, which ensures the continual, economic, efficient, and secure management of MDH's archival medical records. According to MDH, upon receipt of a request from the investigator, the office will determine if the requests exist, coordinate with other units of MDH to *determine the release of records*, coordinate with Maryland State Archives to retrieve the records, and review the records for accuracy prior to release. This process can take between one and four weeks to complete.

MDH advises that it can accommodate up to five record requests per week with existing budgeted resources; however, handling more than six record requests per week necessitates additional staff. Without actual experience under the bill, DLS cannot determine the frequency of record requests by investigators. However, because the bill requires the investigator to review *all available records* from MDH (among other agencies) to identify *every child* who died at HRICC, the magnitude of requests is assumed to be potentially significant, due to the reported *hundreds* of deceased children on the property. Nevertheless, this estimate assumes that MDH and investigators can develop a workload distribution plan to optimize the use of existing personnel without the need for additional staff at MDH.

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## **Additional Information**

**Recent Prior Introductions:** Similar legislation has not been introduced within the last three years.

**Designated Cross File:** None.

**Information Source(s):** Office of the Attorney General; Judiciary (Administrative Office of the Courts); Department of Budget and Management; Maryland Department of Health; Department of Juvenile Services; Maryland State Archives; Department of Legislative Services

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