



RACIAL EQUITY IMPACT NOTE

DEPARTMENT OF LEGISLATIVE SERVICES
MARYLAND ▪ GENERAL ▪ ASSEMBLY

2026 Session
SB0537

Youth Delinquency Prevention Fund - Establishment

Bill Summary

This bill establishes the Youth Delinquency Prevention Fund to be administered by the Governor's Office of Crime Prevention and Policy. The purpose of the fund is to provide grants to community-based programs, including Youth Service Bureaus (YSB), that provide services to (1) provide community-oriented delinquency prevention, youth suicide prevention, drug and alcohol abuse prevention, and youth development; (2) ameliorate conditions that contribute to delinquency, youth suicide, drug and alcohol abuse, and family disruption; and (3) advocate for youth needs.

Racial Equity Impact Statement

Considering that Black youth are generally overrepresented in the juvenile justice system, the bill's investment in diversionary programming would be particularly beneficial to these individuals. The number of YSBs in the State has declined over the past three decades, and YSBs are currently available in only three jurisdictions. Past limited research suggests that YSBs substantially help juveniles reduce future contacts with the juvenile justice system. Accordingly, the bill promotes early intervention to prevent delinquency and reduce racial disparities in the juvenile justice system. The specific impacts will depend on how the bill is funded and implemented.

Analysis

According to the Department of Juvenile Services (DJS), YSBs play a unique role as trusted, community-based entities with strong ties to schools, families, and local organizations. However, the number and limited resources of YSBs restrict their reach and create geographic inequities in

access to services. There are four YSBs currently operating in Baltimore City and Carroll and Prince George's counties. At its height, there were 22 bureaus across 10 jurisdictions in the State.

Current YSBs in Maryland provide a mix of prevention and intervention services, including:

- individual and family counseling to address early signs of delinquency or family conflict;
- mentoring and life skills programs to build protective factors;
- school-based programming on substance use prevention, conflict resolution, and suicide prevention;
- community outreach and advocacy, ensuring youth voices are heard in local decision-making; and
- referral and linkage services, connecting youth to mental health, workforce development, and educational support.

DJS Diversion Activity and Youth Service Bureaus

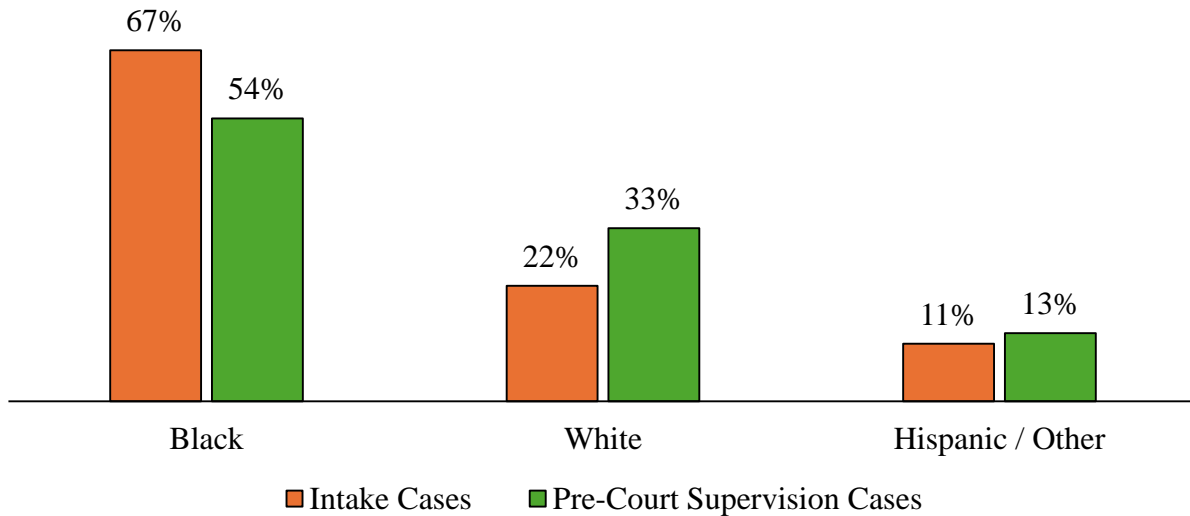
Pre-court supervision, also referred to as “informal adjustment,” diverts youth from formal juvenile court processing with the intention of holding youth accountable for their actions while avoiding formal processing in the courts. A DJS intake officer can offer pre-court supervision when they determine that the juvenile court has jurisdiction, but that it would be in the best interests of the public and the youth to handle the complaint without judicial action. Youth referred for less serious offenses and with a lower risk of recidivism are more likely to be handled informally.

YSBs are one component of diversionary services utilized by DJS in place of formal petitions to the juvenile court. Cases that are referred to pre-court supervision or that are resolved at intake may involve YSB services. YSBs and other community-based organizations are service providers for DJS youth in the pre-delinquent or diversion-related pipeline and are considered key to delinquency prevention.

DJS reports that the proportion of complaints diverted from juvenile court, either by resolving complaints at intake or by entering into informal pre-court agreements, declined from 57% to 53% in 2024. Diverted youth have a high rate of success, with few having new offenses within a year.

Exhibit 1 shows the percentage of intakes and pre-court supervision referrals by race and ethnicity for fiscal 2025. Black juveniles comprised 67% of the intake population and 54% of the pre-court supervision population in that year.

Exhibit 1
DJS Intake Cases and Pre-court Supervision Cases by Race and Ethnicity
Fiscal 2025



Source: Department of Juvenile Services

Community-based Organizations and Diversion Programs

Community-oriented delinquency prevention is designed to address the underlying drivers of delinquent behavior. These services often include academic monitoring and tutoring to address educational disengagement, which is a well-documented risk factor for juvenile justice involvement. By strengthening school attachment and improving academic performance, these interventions help reduce the likelihood of future contact with the juvenile justice system. In addition to educational supports, delinquency prevention programming provides access to mental and behavioral health services, including individual counseling, conflict mediation, and crisis intervention. These services are particularly critical given the high prevalence of unmet mental health needs among justice-involved youth.

A defining feature of YSB-affiliated diversion programs is their emphasis on family engagement and stabilization. This often includes referrals to wraparound services such as family counseling, substance use treatment programs, housing assistance, and food security resources.

Conclusion

YSBs and other predelinquent diversion programs are a major component of DJS's strategy for diversion of youth from the school-to-prison pipeline. These community-based interventions are tailored to the specific contexts of the populations they serve. This more localized approach

enhances program accessibility and effectiveness, particularly for historically marginalized communities that may distrust formal justice institutions. By addressing both individual and structural factors, YSBs and their partner organizations play a critical role in interrupting pathways into the juvenile justice system. As such, expanding investment in these programs through the Youth Delinquency Prevention Fund would represent a shift toward preventative, community-driven solutions that advance both public safety and racial equity.

Information Sources: Department of Juvenile Services; U.S. Department of Justice; Department of Legislative Services

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Appendix – Maryland Demographics

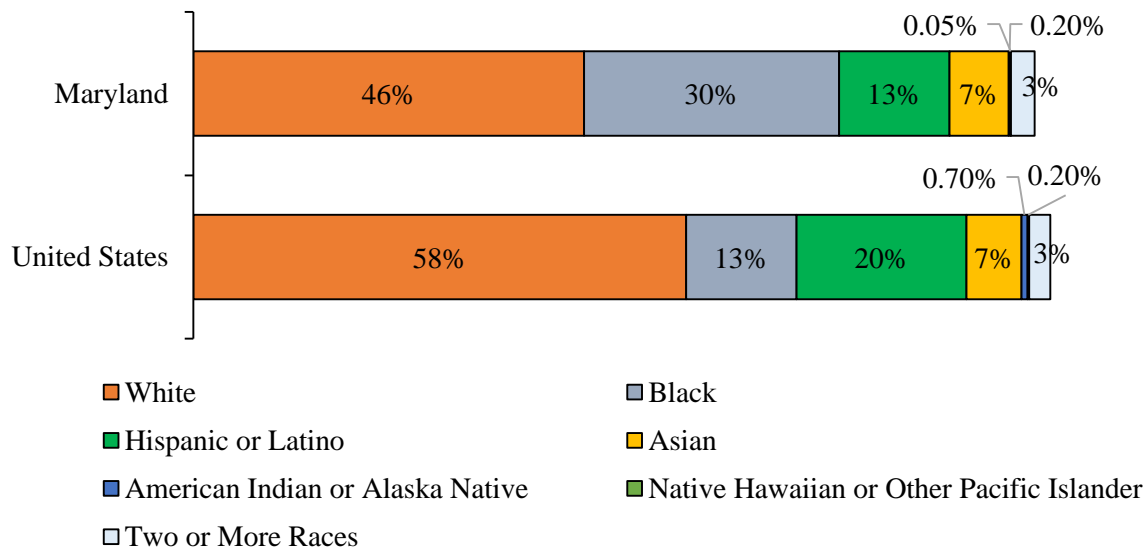
Race and Ethnicity of the Maryland Population

Maryland’s 2020 census population is 6,177,244, a 7% increase from the 2010 census count and approximately 2% higher than the 2019 census population estimates. Maryland remains one of the most racially and ethnically diverse states in the nation and is ranked as the fourth most diverse state by the U.S. Census Bureau’s [Diversity Index](#). While no single racial or ethnic group constitutes a majority, racial minorities as a group constitute a majority of the State’s population. This diversity underpins the analytical framework used in racial equity impact notes (REIN), which seek to identify potential disparities that may be exacerbated or created by proposed criminal justice legislation.

Methodology Update

Beginning in 2025, REIN will use annual population estimates from the U.S. Census Bureau’s Population Estimates Program (PEP) as the basis for disparity and disproportionality calculations. This methodological update reflects best practices in demographic analysis, as PEP data incorporate births, deaths, and migration to provide the most current population counts between censuses. Although the estimates are more temporally responsive, they do not materially change the proportionate racial and ethnic breakdown observed in the 2020 census. Instead, they conservatively reflect population changes since 2020 while preserving the overall demographic composition of the State.

**U.S. and Maryland Population by Race and Ethnicity
2024 Population Estimates**



Note: Percentages do not total 100% due to rounding.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau