



## Testimony for the House Appropriations Committee

March 12, 2020

### HB 1514 State Personnel and Pensions - Maryland Whistleblower Law - Department of Juvenile Services Employees

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The ACLU of Maryland urges a favorable report on HB 1514, which would strengthen whistleblower protections for employees of the Department of Juvenile Services (DJS) who report concerns to the Juvenile Justice Monitoring Unit.

The ACLU of Maryland has long been deeply committed to protecting the rights of incarcerated and institutionalized people, including, of course, children. In our organization's long history of work on issues relating to prisoners' rights, no method of preventing abuse and encouraging reform has proven more effective than the simple act of shining a light into facilities that are otherwise free from public scrutiny.

The ACLU of Maryland and other advocacy groups rely heavily on the reports of the Juvenile Justice Monitoring Unit to provide information about concerns at specific institutions, but also to provide us with a broader picture of what is happening in DJS facilities more generally. These reports are critical to giving the public—and the Maryland General Assembly—a clear understanding of when a particular problem is isolated and when it may reflect a broader, systemic pattern of misconduct.

Candidly—without the JJMU, communities, loved ones, and elected leaders would have no way of knowing what is happening in DJS facilities. The JJMU serves as the only consistent voice describing the experience of children in DJS custody.

By strengthening protections for DJS employees who observe misconduct or inappropriate conduct within the department, HB 1514 bolsters the reliability and integrity of the JJMU process, which can only benefit our communities and most importantly, the children in DJS care.

For these reasons, we urge a favorable report on HB 1514.