



MARYLAND JUVENILE JUSTICE MONITORING UNIT

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 853: JUVENILE LAW – JUVENILE JUSTICE REFORM

Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

March 3, 2021

Submitted by Nick Moroney, director, Juvenile Justice Monitoring Unit (JJMU)

The Juvenile Justice Monitoring Unit (JJMU) strongly supports SB 853, which will bring much needed substantial change to many of the outdated and ineffective practices and procedures in the Maryland juvenile justice system that have caused young people to suffer from unnecessary incarceration.

The JJMU is an independent state agency housed in the Office of the Maryland Attorney General. Monitors from the Unit perform unannounced visits to Maryland Department of Juvenile Services' (DJS') operated facilities in order to fulfil our mission of guarding against abuse of incarcerated young people and ensuring that they receive appropriate treatment and services, including education-related services. Our public reports can be accessed via the following link:
<https://www.marylandattorneygeneral.gov/pages/jjm/default.aspx>

Over the past decade, the Maryland Department of Juvenile Services has made tremendous strides in reducing unnecessary incarceration of youth. However, we still have many young people in Maryland who are stuck in maximum security detention facilities or sent out-of-home to remote environments far from their homes, families and communities. As African American/Black and Hispanic/Latinx young people form the vast majority of the incarcerated Maryland youth population, this severing of home, family and community ties and transportation to an alien environment has grossly disproportionate effects on young men and young women of color. Many (if not most) incarcerated youth already suffer from financially vulnerable situations and a paucity of appropriate education resources and career opportunities – these negative conditions are exacerbated through incarceration. Incarceration stymies progress and growth and fails to address or mitigate the challenges faced by disadvantaged youth and their families.

SB 853 would end the use of state-run youth jails and youth prisons for children and young people who are accused of committing a misdemeanor offense or who have allegedly committed a technical violation of probation. In place of incarceration, young people will be able to avail of non-carceral based local programming through DJS. The bill also mandates that DJS study and report on how to move away from remote facility based housing of young people and toward the bolstering and utilization of local community resources (non-residential and residential) to ensure constructive, specialized and individualized supports are available to young people in contact with the legal system. In sum, SB 853 offers a viable alternative to Maryland's current failed approach to juvenile justice.

For these reasons, the JJMU supports SB 853 and respectfully urges the committee to give the bill a favorable report.