



Montgomery County Young Democrats Testimony to the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee in Support of SB 497 - Juvenile Services Education Board and Program – Establishment, Powers, and Duties 2/17/2021

Senators Kelley, Guzzone, Carter, Beidle, McCray, Feldman, Eckardt, Augustine, Smith, Sydnor and members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee:

The Montgomery County Young Democrats (MCYD) support [Senate Bill 497](#) (House Bill 71), which establishes a Juvenile Services Education Board in the Department of Juvenile Services, a Juvenile Services Education Program and requires the Board to appoint a Juvenile Services Education Program Superintendent, who shall hire staff and contract for-profit and nonprofit organizations to administer educational services to help students in the system finish school and pursue a post-secondary education. This bill will improve graduation/reintegration and ensure proper and thoughtful student advocacy, and result in short term and long term improvements for the community.

Montgomery County Young Democrats is an organization of young Democrats, ages 14-34, who are working to make Montgomery County and Maryland better places to live, with freedom, opportunity, and justice for all. With that, we are invested in the assurance that all young people, especially those in Juvenile Services, have fair access to an adequate education that provides them the opportunity to attain the same degrees and resources available as their public school counterparts to be successful in society. This starts with the creation of a Juvenile Services Education Board in the Department of Juvenile Services, and a Juvenile Services Education Program.

Post-release, justice-involved youth typically lag behind other youth in self-clarity, self-esteem, and decision-making. These are all critical factors that can ultimately shape their future. A study by the National Institute of Justice found that confined youth are up to four times less likely to complete high school and subsequently less likely to be working full time and to have completed college by their late 20s. More than 90% of the youth in the study attended school within their juvenile residential facility, demonstrating that these long-term impacts stem not from lack of access to education, but from the quality of educational and reintegration services. Specific challenges include:

- Substandard education while incarcerated;
- Failure of many correctional educational facilities to use curricula aligned with state standards, which can result in credits not transferring or being accepted by the home school district;
- Significant delays in the transfer of youth's educational records and credits from the correctional educational facility to their community school upon release; and
- Barriers some schools and states have enacted that prevent youth from re-enrolling in school.

Student advocacy is an essential part of the education system. The presence of a dedicated interdepartmental team to advocate for youth needs will disrupt the systemic disproportional issues faced by youth in juvenile justice systems, especially involving mental health services.

- It is estimated that between 50-75% of youth in juvenile detention facilities have diagnosable mental disorders;
- According to the National Alliance on Mental Health, housing an inmate with mental illness in jail costs \$31,000 annually; comparatively a report by the California Mental Health Directors Association estimates costs of about \$18,000 for youths in juvenile detention centers.

By creating programs to actively track and monitor youths in juvenile facilities, student advocates can ensure that the youths are getting the help they need to become welcomed members of society and potentially save each facility \$13,000 per year.

An analysis by the Justice Policy Institute found that the national average cost to confine one youth is now \$214,620 per year, an increase of 44% over the last six years, with taxpayers in Maryland spending an estimated \$292,156 per year for a single young person's confinement. Advancing educational and transitional services for youth in juvenile justice facilities is a vitally important and cost-effective strategy for ensuring they become productive members of their communities and reducing the likelihood of recidivism, as well as mitigating harm to future economic opportunities and health outcomes.

In addition, the establishment of a Juvenile Services Education Board and Program is a concrete step towards addressing issues of racial equity and social justice. According to the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, twice as many youth of color are placed in juvenile residential facilities as compared to white youth. Specifically, Black, Native American, and Latinx youth are incarcerated at 5, 3, and 1.7 times the rate of white youth, respectively, with disparities increasing as youth move deeper into the system. The individualized and wraparound services that a Juvenile Services Education Board and Program would provide ensures that all youth, especially those disproportionately represented in the juvenile justice system, receive every opportunity to rehabilitate and re-enter the community prepared to exercise the duties and opportunities of productive citizenship.

In conjunction with organizations like the National League of Cities and the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the Juvenile Services Education Board in the Department of Juvenile Services and the Juvenile Services Education Program will undoubtedly create sustainable plans to mitigate

the negative outcomes of detention and high recidivism, ultimately making communities more safe.

- According to the 2016 The Pathways to Desistance Study, conducted by the Performance Based Standards Learning Institute, youths who reported a generally more positive facility experience were about 36 percent less likely to continue offending, according to self-reports, and about 49 percent less likely to continue, according to arrest and/or return to placement reports.
- The Annie E. Casey Foundation reports that counseling, skill building and restorative justice, reduce reoffending by 10%.
- Having a mental health problem while in the system can increase likelihood of recidivating. In the 2013 study “Factors Related to Recidivism for Youthful Offenders.” it found that having a conduct disorder diagnosis predicted subsequent recidivism to detention placement.

An education program that teaches as well as treats the youth will strengthen re-entry plans and keep recidivism low.

Maryland would be pioneering a program unlike anything else currently available in the U.S juvenile detention centers. This will be an opportunity for Maryland to address current limits of measuring positive development outcomes of youth in the juvenile justice system and demonstrate leadership through a commitment to creating equitable systems for young people to thrive.

The Montgomery County Young Democrats urge you to favorably support SB 497, vote for it, and ask your colleagues to vote for it as well.