



SB0905 – Juvenile Services – Workgroup to Develop Evidence-Based, Research-Based, and Culturally Competent Practices

Presented to the Hon. Will Smith and Members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
March 3, 2021 12:30 p.m.

POSITION: SUPPORT

NARAL Pro-Choice Maryland urges Members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee to issue a **favorable report on SB0905 – Juvenile Services – Workgroup to Develop Evidence-Based, Research-Based, and Culturally Competent Practices**, sponsored by Senator Charles Sydnor.

Our organization is an advocate for reproductive health, rights, and justice. As part of our efforts to protect reproductive freedom for all Marylanders, we work to ensure every individual has the right to decide if, when, and how to form their families, and to parent in good health, in safety, and with dignity. In doing so, we aim to advance the reproductive rights and freedoms of all youth in our state, including youth who are currently detained in juvenile services. It is essential that youth, both under the age of 18 and as young adults, have equal, quality access to the resources that would allow them to make decisions about their own reproductive and sexual health. Yet, this is not the case for many young people in Maryland. A lack of comprehensive and inclusive sex education, affordable forms of contraception, and access to family planning resources limit the ability for youth to exercise control over their futures.

By law, the Maryland Department of Juvenile Services (DJS) is a child-serving agency responsible for assessing the individual needs of referred youth and providing intake, detention, probation, commitment, and after-care services.¹ According to their mission, DJS is committed to keeping youth safe while delivering services to meet youth needs. Currently, there is no public information available on the resources DJS provides youth when it comes to reproductive and sexual health. We must ensure that youth held in juvenile services have the same access to inclusive sex education, affordable forms of contraception, and family planning resources as their peers who are not in the system.

A parent or legal guardian cannot force a pregnant minor (someone under the age of 18) in their care to have an abortion, to continue a pregnancy, or to place a baby for adoption. It is important that pregnant minors have the ability to make their own decision, no matter what the choice may be, without pressure or coercion from others. We must work to better equip our youth in juvenile services with the resources necessary to make informed decisions on protecting their bodily autonomy and their right to decide when they want to form their own families. Youth in juvenile services need access to health experts to get their questions answered and make decisions regarding their personal health that are best for them.

SB0905 seeks to establish a workgroup to increase accountability for prevention and intervention services delivered to children by DJS. DJS and the Department of Human Services shall convene a workgroup with the

Maryland Public Policy Institute and relevant stakeholders in areas of child welfare, juvenile rehabilitation, and juvenile mental health to explore the use of evidence-based, research-based, and culturally competent practices. Our organization strongly recommends that someone who works in health services also participate in this workgroup as a stakeholder to ensure that moving forward the health needs of youth are being met.

Without properly addressing the needs of youth in juvenile services, we are setting these young people up for failure to eventually reenter society. It is crucial that we use evidence-based, research-based, and culturally competent practices through the establishment of a workgroup to better understand the services we are currently providing our youth and the services we need to provide our youth. For these reasons, NARAL Pro-Choice Maryland **urges a favorable committee report on SB0905**. Thank you for your time and consideration.

ⁱ Maryland Department of Juvenile Services. Retrieved February 22, 2021, from <https://djs.maryland.gov/Pages/about-us/About.aspx>