



STATE OF MARYLAND
JUVENILE JUSTICE MONITORING UNIT

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 459

JUVENILE JUSTICE REFORM

House Judiciary Committee
February 10, 2022

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

The Juvenile Justice Monitoring Unit (JJMU) supports HB 459 – Juvenile Justice Reform. The JJMU is an independent state agency based in the Attorney General’s office and working to prevent abuse and ensure appropriate services within the juvenile justice system. Our reports are at: <https://www.marylandattorneygeneral.gov/pages/jjm/default.aspx>

Over the past decade, the Department of Juvenile Services and the courts have increased efforts to try and ensure children and young people who do not pose a threat to community safety are kept out of the deep end of the juvenile system – that is, out of the secure detention and placement centers that are the youth equivalent of adult lockups and prisons. But there is only so much those entities can do to protect young people from unnecessary involvement with the deep end of our state’s juvenile justice system; legislative action is also necessary to codify positive change in the juvenile justice system.

HB 459 contains the recommendations of the Juvenile Justice Reform Council, a legislatively enabled group that includes a varied cross section of people involved with the Maryland juvenile justice system including prosecutors and public defenders, agency heads and legislators, advocates for victims and for incarcerated youth, as well as state and national experts concentrating on effective juvenile justice systems. This cross section of stakeholders voted overwhelmingly in favor of the recommendations contained in the bill.

The reforms contained in the legislation are modest fixes which will help ameliorate some problems associated with the juvenile justice system in our state. These problems include open ended probation periods and a permissive approach to incarceration that allows for young children to be detained in maximum security facilities. Such issues must be positively addressed if we seek to move toward a more just and effective system for children and young people in contact with the law in Maryland.

For all of the reasons stated above, the Juvenile Justice Monitoring Unit fully supports HB 459 and respectfully urges the committee to give this bill a favorable report.