



TO: The Honorable William C. Smith, Jr., Chair
Members, Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
The Honorable President of the Senate Bill Ferguson

FROM: Pamela Metz Kasemeyer
J. Steven Wise
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DATE: February 9, 2024

RE: **LETTER OF INFORMATION** – Senate Bill 744 – *Juvenile Law – Reform*

The Maryland Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics (MDAAP) is a statewide association representing more than 1,100 pediatricians and allied pediatric and adolescent healthcare practitioners in the State and is a strong and established advocate promoting the health and safety of all the children we serve. On behalf of MDAAP, we submit this **letter of information** for Senate Bill 744 to request the consideration of several additions to the legislation that they believe will serve to improve its objectives.

MDAAP appreciates this initiative is being advanced to address the noted increase in crime by juveniles, while seeking to retain the enhancements, protections, and reforms to the juvenile justice system recently enacted by the General Assembly. MDAAP believes its requested clarifications and additions will help prevent unintended consequences that could lead to youth living in areas of higher crime with higher police presence, being more likely to be processed through the juvenile court, and detained, rather than allowing police and the Department of Juvenile Services (DJS) to handle complaints. To that end, we would request consideration of the following clarifications and additions:

1. Define “excused” absence.

The bill proposes that two or more “unexcused” absences for treatment can result in a violation of probation, which can lead to detention. This may unfairly affect youth that have disadvantages with respect to transportation, parental support, or effective communication with providers, such as immigrant youth.

2. Add a pediatric medical provider and/or a child/adolescent behavioral health provider to the membership of the Commission on Juvenile Justice Reform and Emerging and Best Practices.

The Commission is required, amongst other duties, to review fatalities under DJS supervision, identification of, and ensuring emerging and best practices for juvenile justice involved youth; and

reporting on necessary services not being provided. Input from the pediatrician/adolescent medical provider would enhance the effectiveness of the Commission in meeting its responsibilities.

3. Include a requirement for the Commission or State entity to monitor and evaluate the impact of the bill on the ability of DJS, the States' Attorney, and the police to handle the proposed change in demand/work created by the proposed system changes and to study the effectiveness of the initiatives in addressing juvenile crime.

Additional resources may be needed to meet the legislation's objectives and/or there may be unintended consequences of the reforms that negatively impact youth from certain communities and worsening disparities with respect to increasing likelihood for detention of some youth, including youth under age 13.

MDAAP looks forward to working with the General Assembly in effectively addressing Juvenile Justice and requests the consideration of the above noted additions to Senate Bill 744.

For more information call:

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