

THE COALITION TO PROTECT MARYLAND'S CHILDREN

Our Mission: To combine and amplify the power of organizations and citizens working together to keep children safe from abuse and neglect. We strive to secure the budgetary and public policy resources to make meaningful and measurable improvements in safety, permanence, and well-being.

Senate Bill 732: Department of Juvenile Services and Maryland Department of Health – Inpatient Program for Children

**Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
February 28, 2024**

Letter of Information

The Coalition to Protect Maryland's Children (CPMC) is a consortium of child and family-serving organizations concerned about the welfare of Maryland's vulnerable children and their family¹.

Senate Bill 732: Department of Juvenile Services and Maryland Department of Health – Inpatient Program for Children is a bill designed to create an inpatient unit for youth that would provide a full range of behavioral health and substance use disorder care and treatment to adjudicated delinquent.

We had questions about the type of facility, where it would be located, how youth would gain access and so on, but conceptually strongly support any effort to increase capacity for therapeutic residential care for the children and youth in our state's care who have high intensity behavioral health needs. These are youth with many strengths, but also a history of behaviors that pose a risk to themselves and/or others that make placement challenging. Included in this group are youth arrested after an episode such as car theft, property destruction, drug distribution or other crime not warranting detention whose parents/caregivers refuse to allow the youth to return home.

Maryland has had an ever-deepening crisis identifying therapeutic care for youth with special needs; the practice of "hoteling" – literally getting a child a hotel room with a 1:1 aide and gift cards for food – first began in 2019. Today there may be as many as 50 children and youth in Maryland hotels at a cost of roughly \$40,000 to \$60,000 per child each month, or approximately \$3 million per month. Children and youth have also been left on overstay in psychiatric hospitals, and some even 'boarded' in an emergency room, a practice that seems to have 'quieted down.'

Nonetheless it's apparent that Maryland is failing its children and their families when a specialized placement is necessary and existing providers have no capacity in terms of space or expertise, regardless of the child serving door they come through – DJS or DHS. This is not a new problem but one left unsolved by the last administration that has now become the Moore administration's to solve.

Thank you for your attention to this important issue.

¹ Members of CMPC who support this letter of information letter include Child Justice, Citizens Review Board for Children, Fostering Change Network Foundation, Franklin Law Group, Maryland Chapter American Academy of Pediatrics, Maryland Association for Resources for Family and Youth, MOMCares, National Association of Social Workers - Maryland, Tim Briceland-Betts (individual) and Diana Philip (individual).