



**STATE OF MARYLAND
OFFICE OF THE CORRECTIONAL
OMBUDSMAN
JUVENILE JUSTICE MONITORING
UNIT**

**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 827: JUVENILE LAW – CONFINEMENT AND
RESTRICTIVE HOUSING - LIMITATIONS**

Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

February 19, 2025

Submitted by Nick Moroney, Juvenile Justice Monitoring Unit

The Juvenile Justice Monitoring Unit supports SB 827, which, if passed, will place limits on the use of restrictive housing on children and young people held in correctional facilities.

The JJMU was established in the wake of widespread systemic abuse issues in the Maryland juvenile justice system. Unit monitors perform unannounced visits to Maryland Department of Juvenile Services' (DJS') operated facilities to guard against abuse of incarcerated young people and ensure that they receive appropriate treatment and services.

The proposed legislation is necessary and will benefit incarcerated young people. While DJS policy limits the circumstances and length of time under which separation of a young person from the general population can be used, and mandates medical and mental health services involvement and ongoing documentation of the situation, this departmental policy is not enshrined in statute.

Young people held in non-DJS operated facilities such as local detention centers, jails and prisons are especially in need of the protections proposed in this bill. Use of restrictive housing in prisons and jails further compounds the inherent trauma of incarceration, and the deleterious effect of this practice is particularly harmful to young people. Most of the young people in the juvenile and criminal justice system have been exposed to violence, and justice-involved youth have a high prevalence of traumatic stress and mental health disorders. The utilization of restrictive housing in correctional settings has been shown to both cause acute mental health problems and exacerbate existing mental health conditions. Furthermore, rather than de-escalating heightened emotions and promoting positive behavior, isolation can increase anxiety, agitation and feelings of aggression.

In contrast, well-designed intensive and holistic interventions and programming, including those that utilize positive behavioral supports, cognitive therapy, and social skills training have been proven to reduce aggressiveness and acting-out behavior and promote positive youth development. SB 827 privileges the use of such programming support over the harmful practice of restrictive housing and will lead to improved safety and better short and longer-term outcomes for incarcerated young people.

For all the reasons just given, the JJMU strongly supports this important bill and respectfully urges the committee to give SB 827 a favorable report.