



MARYLAND ALLIANCE FOR JUSTICE REFORM

Citizens working to reform criminal justice in Maryland



www.MA4JR.org

Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

February 19, 2025

Testimony in support of SB 827—Juvenile Law – Confinement and Restrictive Housing – Limitations

We are testifying on behalf of the [Maryland Alliance for Justice Reform](http://www.MA4JR.org) (MAJR), where we serve as executive committee members and co-chairs of the Behind the Walls Workgroup.

This bill is a crucial step toward protecting vulnerable youth by restricting the use of involuntary restrictive housing to cases where it is necessary to eliminate an identifiable risk.

Restrictive housing, often referred to as solitary confinement, has severe and lasting consequences for juveniles. Adolescents are in a critical stage of brain development, and prolonged isolation exacerbates mental health conditions, increases anxiety, and significantly raises the risk of self-harm and suicide. National data shows that over half of juvenile suicides in custody occur while youth are in isolation.

Beyond the psychological toll, restrictive housing also hinders rehabilitation. Youth in solitary confinement have limited access to education, counseling, and other programming essential for their growth and successful reintegration. The practice disproportionately affects youth with disabilities, trauma histories, and mental health challenges, further deepening disparities in the juvenile justice system.

By prohibiting the placement of a minor in restrictive housing for more than six hours, this legislation acknowledges the well-documented psychological and developmental harm that prolonged isolation can cause to children. Research has consistently shown that extended periods of solitary confinement can exacerbate mental health issues, hinder rehabilitation, and increase the likelihood of adverse long-term outcomes.

The bill appropriately allows minors to voluntarily request restrictive housing when they feel unsafe, while ensuring that correctional facilities meet specific standards when detaining, confining, or transporting children. These provisions reflect a balanced and humane approach that prioritizes both the safety and the mental health of incarcerated youth.

We urge the committee to support this critical bill with these recommended modifications. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Donna Rojas
District 6

Judith Lichtenberg
District 22