

Testimony Submitted to Senate

Judicial Proceedings Committee

Support

March 20, 2025

HB 814 - Department of Juvenile Services - Report on Youth Service Bureaus - Support

KEYS Empowers, Inc. supports HB 814 – Department of Juvenile Services - Report on Youth Service Bureaus. HB 814 requests the Department of Juvenile Services to provide a report outlining the Department’s efforts to collaborate with local governments in the funding and establishment of Youth Service Bureaus (YSBs) and collaborations between DJS and YSBs to prevent delinquency.

Youth Service Bureaus have been part of Maryland’s strategy for over 40 years, providing a network of prevention services. This network was designed to be community-based and to partner with local schools, faith-based organizations, and local government agencies to enhance the health, safety, and well-being of Maryland’s children, youth, and families. The success of YSBs can be attributed to our preventive, community-based, family-focused approach to the development of protective factors for young people and their families.

At KEYS Empowers, Inc., we are proud of the impactful work we have completed as the Youth Service Bureau for Baltimore City since 2022. Our efforts have been instrumental in enhancing the health, safety, and well-being of Maryland’s children, youth, and families through a community-based, family- focused approach.

Services Provided

KEYS Empowers, Inc. has delivered a comprehensive range of services designed to support the development of protective factors for young people and their families. Our core services include:

- **Counseling Services:** Providing individual, family, and group counseling, as well as substance use screening, crisis intervention, suicide prevention, and trauma-informed care.
- **Referral Services:** Connecting individuals to essential services such as housing, primary care physicians, mental health, dental and vision services, vocational training, and legal services.
- **Community Programming:** Offering parenting classes, culinary therapy, art therapy, photo therapy, music therapy, after-school programming, workforce development, peer mediation, and youth violence reduction.
- **Barrier Removal:** Assisting with transportation, vital records, health insurance, food security, day care vouchers, job applications, clothing, hygiene needs, and child support.

Connection to the Department of Juvenile Services (DJS)

Our connection with the Department of Juvenile Services has been a vital aspect of our work. We receive referrals from DJS and have established a collaborative relationship by regularly meeting with unit supervisors and case managers to discuss our services and ensure that justice-involved youth receive the support they need. To strengthen our connection with DJS, we plan to:

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- **Increase Communication:** Enhance regular communication with DJS staff to ensure they are fully aware of our services and the benefits they offer to justice-involved youth.
- **Host Informational Sessions:** Organize sessions to inform new DJS staff about our enrollment process and the range of services we provide.
- **Collaborate on Programs:** Develop joint programs with DJS to address the specific needs of justice-involved youth, focusing on prevention and rehabilitation.

Success in Working with Families in Our Community

Our success in working with families in Baltimore City is evident through the positive impact of our programs and services. Some of our notable achievements include:

- **Graduation and Post-Graduation Support:** In the last 2 years, we have assisted 17 seniors with graduation and post-graduation needs, with 67% of those contacted 90 days post-discharge still working or enrolled in vocational/educational programs.
- **Legal Assistance:** Engaging 8 consumers through legal assistance for services such as restitution, fees, lawyer fees, community service, anger management, and workforce development.
- **Collaborative Partnerships:** Securing Memorandums of Understanding with key organizations such as The Center For Urban Families, Mayor's Office of Neighborhood Safety & Engagement, and YO! Baltimore.
- **Barrier Removal:** Providing essential services like eviction prevention, utility assistance, and transportation, which have significantly improved the quality of life for our participants.

Since its creation, YSBs have maintained a deep connection with the Department of Juvenile Services, one that could be strengthened at this time when community services are greatly needed. YSBs are known for providing effective mental health and prevention services. Indeed, **95% of youth** served in formal counseling by a YSB do **NOT** enter the juvenile justice system two years after ending counseling.

We respectfully ask you to support this bill.

Respectfully Submitted:

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Ajah Doswell", with "LMSW" written in smaller letters to the right.

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