

**House Bill 814 – Department of Juvenile Services – Report on Youth Service Bureaus**  
House Judiciary Committee  
February 26, 2025  
**Position: Favorable**

Mental Health Association of Maryland (MHAMD) is a nonprofit education and advocacy organization that brings together consumers, families, clinicians, advocates and concerned citizens for unified action in all aspects of mental health and substance use disorders (collectively referred to as behavioral health). We appreciate the opportunity to provide this testimony in support of HB 814.

HB 814 requires the Department of Juvenile Services (DJS) to report to the legislature on their efforts to promote predelinquent programs, including Youth Service Bureaus (YSBs), and their efforts to partner with local jurisdictions to establish YSBs.

YSBs have existed in Maryland for over 40 years. They have been shown to successfully provide juvenile justice diversion by providing mental health and substance use assessment, prevention and treatment services, involving both the youth and family.

Mental health conditions are prevalent among juvenile offenders. Some estimates suggest that the numbers are as high as 30% with depression or dysthymia, 30% with attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder, 7% with bipolar disorder, and 32% with posttraumatic stress disorder. On top of these mental health conditions, many juvenile offenders also have a conduct disorder or a substance use disorder.<sup>1</sup> By addressing these conditions, YSBs achieve outstanding outcomes: 95% of youth served in counseling do not enter the juvenile justice system two years after ending counseling.

A decade ago, a statewide network of YSBs received State funding through the Maryland Children’s Cabinet. In 2016, the priorities of the Children’s Cabinet shifted, and juvenile justice diversion programs were no longer on the menu of programs that could be funded, causing many YSBs to close or limit services.

Yet YSBs should be a statewide resource. In fact, in a January 2025 briefing to the Judicial Proceedings Committee, Secretary Schiraldi, when asked about DJS’s prevention and diversion services, specifically called out the benefits of YSBs and said that he wished there were one in every jurisdiction.

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<sup>1</sup> Lee Underwood et.al. Mental Illness and Juvenile Offenders. International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health (2018).

YSBs are cost effective for the State because they are required to be State and local government partnerships. In addition, YSBs leverage grants and fees to diversify the funding of their programs. HB 814, by directing DJS to partner with local jurisdictions to establish YSBs, will bring about great benefits at a relatively low cost to the state, and will ultimately save dollars by keeping youth out of the juvenile justice system.

For this reason, MHAMD supports HB 814 and urges a favorable report.