



Testimony submitted to House Judiciary Committee
February 26, 2025

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

Support

Maryland's Youth Service Bureaus (YSBs) provide effective youth delinquency diversion treatment and family intervention services aimed at developing competent youth who can become responsible and productive members of society. We support House Bill 814.

YSBs have been part of Maryland's delinquency prevention strategy for over 40 years, and work with youth and their families in helping to build effective skills to change behaviors. The network of YSBs have built strong, long-standing partnerships 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 can be attributed to their prevention, community-based, family-focused approach to the development of a young person and their family's protective factors.

YSBs are partnerships between state and local governments and should exist in every jurisdiction in Maryland, yet the gradual erosion of state funding has led to decline in the number of YSBs across the State. **This bill will be a significant step in rebuilding the network of YSBs and serving young people who come into contact with the juvenile justice system or who are demonstrating at-risk behaviors for delinquency.**

Many of the organizations that had been designated as YSBs that lost state funding still exist, but do not provide all of the services that are mandated in law to be an YSB. Several programs, unfortunately, closed permanently. However, there are many organizations that stand ready and willing to re-establish themselves as YSBs.

YSBs exist in Maryland statute within the Department of Juvenile Services (DJS) and are required to provide juvenile justice diversion. YSBs provide mental health and substance use assessment, prevention, and treatment services as well as community specific services to achieve this goal. Since their creation, YSBs have had a deep connection with the DJS, one that could be strengthened by this report.

A majority of young people coming into YSBs are referred for mental health services and the age of children the YSBs serve is getting younger. The pandemic has also added to the complexity of cases, and the demand for mental health services.

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Youth Service Bureaus Provide Effective Mental Health and Prevention Services

- **95% of youth** served in formal counseling do **NOT** enter the juvenile justice system two years after ending counseling
- YSBs measure effectiveness of their counseling services to youth and their families through the empirically-based Child and Adolescent Functional Assessment Scale (CAFAS). YSB results are well above national standards. In Maryland, **80% of youth** assessed by YSBs showed significant improvement, compared to the 60% national standard

Cost Effective Solution to Prevention Services

- YSBs are **cost effective**. Every investment of \$1 by the State leverages an additional \$8 in services

For all these reasons, we urge a favorable report on House Bill 814.