

Aruna Miller  
Lt. Governor

Wes Moore  
Governor

Betsy Fox Tolentino  
Secretary

**Date:** April 2, 2026  
**Bill Number/Title:** SB 776 - Commission on the House of Reformation and Instruction for Colored Children - Establishment  
**Committee:** Government, Labor, and Elections  
**DJS Position:** Favorable

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The Department of Juvenile Services supports SB 776. SB 776 establishes the Commission on the House of Reformation and Instruction for Colored Children, a new State commission charged with investigating, documenting, and publicly accounting for the history and tragedies associated with the House of Reformation and Instruction for Colored Children in Prince George's County. This historic juvenile facility housed Black children during segregation, and many children died while in state custody and were buried in unmarked graves.

The bill creates a formal structure to:

- Research the full history and operations of the institution, including the circumstances surrounding the deaths of children in state care.
- Locate and document graves of children buried on the property.
- Provide a complete and public accounting of the identities of those buried there and the conditions under which they lived and died.
- Promote healing and reconciliation through truth-telling, acknowledgment, and recommendations.
- Ensure that descendants and impacted community members have a meaningful voice in the process.

DJS supports the Commission's membership and structure, including leadership by the Attorney General's Office and representation from members of the General Assembly, State agencies with expertise in historical preservation, planning, juvenile services, and African American history, as well as community representatives, descendants, and academic experts. This structure ensures independence, credibility, and a diversity of expertise necessary to conduct this work responsibly.

### **Actions Already Taken by DJS**

In 2023, DJS began a comprehensive review of the history of the House of Reformation and Instruction for Colored Boys, as well as related early juvenile institutions in Maryland. As that research evolved, the Department brought renewed attention to the cemetery associated with the House of Reformation.

DJS has worked to ensure that this history is not hidden. The findings have been incorporated into Entry Level Training for all new staff to ensure they understand the historical foundations of Maryland's juvenile justice system. Youth have also been provided opportunities to learn about this history through educational projects, and the Juvenile Services Education Program has integrated research findings into its curriculum for individual and group work.

In partnership with young people, DJS completed an application for a roadside historical marker. A marker commemorating the site and its history will soon be unveiled, ensuring public acknowledgment of the institution and its legacy.

DJS applied for and received grant funding from the Maryland Historical Trust to support restoration efforts. The grant will fund an archaeological survey using ground-penetrating radar to identify unmarked burials, reset and repair existing grave markers, install perimeter fencing and commemorative signage, and develop a long-term conservation plan. These funds were recently approved, and DJS has committed to utilizing these funds in coordination with the Commission established by SB 776.

Additionally, Governor Moore, through his proposed budget, has committed an additional \$250,000 to DJS to support the work of the Commission. DJS is fully committed to directing these funds to advance the Commission's efforts and ensure this work is carried out thoroughly, respectfully, and transparently.

### **Why the Commission Is the Right Structure**

While DJS initiated research and restoration efforts, SB 776 appropriately places this work within a broader, independent Commission. The history of the House of Reformation is not solely a DJS issue; it is a matter of statewide historical accountability.

Establishing a Commission allows Maryland to:

- Ensure a full and transparent accounting of deaths and institutional conditions.
- Examine the institution's segregationist history, including policies, living conditions, disciplinary practices, and labor exploitation.
- Center descendant and community voices.
- Develop recommendations for memorialization, respectful preservation, and public education.

DJS began to uncover and confront this history. It is now appropriate to decenter the Department and entrust this work to a Commission charged with bringing together diverse experts and stakeholders to ensure the State learns from, reflects on, and properly memorializes this painful chapter. SB 776 provides the right structure, independence, and public accountability to complete this work with integrity.

For these reasons, the Department of Juvenile Services urges a favorable report on SB 776.