

Aruna Miller
Lt. Governor

Wes Moore
Governor

Betsy Fox Tolentino
Secretary

Date: April 1, 2026
Bill Number/Title: HB 921- Juvenile Law – Confinement and Restrictive Housing – Limitations
Committee: Judicial Proceedings Committee
DJS Position: Favorable

The intent of HB 921 is to clearly outline how room seclusion may be used for youth in the care of the Department of Juvenile Services (DJS). The Department shares the goal of this legislation: to ensure that any use of seclusion is tightly limited, clearly defined, and aligned with nationally recognized best practices for juvenile facilities.

DJS appreciates that our proposed amendments were adopted, strengthening the bill and ensuring consistency with Maryland law. As amended, the bill:

- Places the language in the Human Services Article, aligning it with existing statutes governing DJS;
- Updates terminology to better reflect the Department’s rehabilitative mission; and
- Requires DJS to adopt regulations that incorporate and formalize existing practices that already significantly limit the use of seclusion.

The amended bill establishes a clear statutory framework that:

- Prohibits the use of locked door seclusion and restraints as punishment, convenience, a staffing substitute, or retaliation;
- Limits use to situations where all less restrictive measures have been exhausted and there is an immediate and substantial risk of physical harm or risk of escape;
- Requires that any use be trauma-informed, developmentally appropriate, and time-limited;
- Ensures regular visual supervision, timely medical and behavioral health assessments, and access to basic needs; and
- Requires that seclusion end as soon as the risk has passed and be followed by a debrief and behavioral health review.

For context, current law already places meaningful limits on this practice. Under Human Services Article § 9–227 and COMAR 16.18.02.03, DJS is prohibited from using locked door seclusion as punishment and may only use it to protect safety or prevent escape, subject to strict time limitations and oversight.

By incorporating these amendments, HB 921 aligns statute with current DJS practice, strengthens accountability, and ensures that standards governing seclusion are further detailed through regulation under Maryland’s Administrative Procedure Act, including public transparency and legislative oversight.

As amended, HB 921 reflects a balanced, evidence-based approach that prioritizes safety, accountability, and the rehabilitative needs of youth.

For these reasons, the Department respectfully urges a favorable report on HB 921, as amended.