

**CAROLYN A. QUATTROCKI**  
*Chief Deputy Attorney General*

**LEONARD J. HOWIE III**  
*Deputy Attorney General*

**CARRIE J. WILLIAMS**  
*Deputy Attorney General*

**SHARON S. MERRIWEATHER**  
*Deputy Attorney General*

**ZENITA WICKHAM HURLEY**  
*Deputy Attorney General*



**PETER V. BERNS**  
*General Counsel*

**CHRISTIAN E. BARRERA**  
*Chief of Staff*

**STATE OF MARYLAND**  
**OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL**

**ANTHONY G. BROWN**  
*Attorney General*

February 19, 2026

**TO:** The Honorable William Smith  
Chair, Judicial Proceedings Committee

The Honorable Guy Guzzone  
Chair, Budget and Taxation Committee

**FROM:** Tiffany Clark  
Director, Legislative Affairs, Office of the Attorney General

**RE:** Senate Bill 537 – Youth Delinquency Prevention Fund – Establishment  
(Support in Concept)

---

The Office of the Attorney General (OAG) conceptually supports Senate Bill 537 – Youth Delinquency Prevention Fund - Establishment. SB 537 establishes a special, nonlapsing fund to provide grants for community-based delinquency prevention, youth suicide prevention, substance abuse prevention, and youth development programs.

This legislation directly supports our efforts to advance criminal justice reform and reduce racial disparities in Maryland's criminal justice system through upstream prevention and early intervention, as identified in OAG's Criminal Justice Reform Strategy and the Maryland Equitable Justice Collaborative (MEJC) recommendations.

SB 537 advances critical policy objectives aligned with evidence-based prevention. MEJC's first annual report documents that incarceration before age 17 reduces the likelihood of high school graduation by 26% and significantly increases future criminal legal system involvement. Children from the lowest income bracket are 20 times more likely to be incarcerated in their early 30s compared to higher-income peers, underscoring the urgent need for upstream prevention investments that this bill would support.

SB 537 creates a dedicated funding mechanism for community-level youth prevention. While Maryland invests in youth services through multiple channels, there is currently no dedicated, nonlapsing state fund specifically earmarked for youth delinquency prevention at the community level. The nonlapsing structure and retained interest earnings provide community organizations with greater funding predictability than year-to-year appropriations.

Additionally, the reporting framework supports evidence-based policymaking. The bill's requirement to disaggregate outcome data by age, geographic region, race, and ethnicity, and to track subsequent justice system contact, will generate longitudinal prevention data that is currently unavailable across Maryland's fragmented prevention landscape.

### Why Coordination Is Essential

However, SB 537 operates in a space already occupied by substantial existing infrastructure. Maryland currently invests in youth prevention through multiple channels, including the Children's Cabinet Interagency Fund, the General Assembly's recent \$17 million investment in DJS community-based programs, and existing Youth Service Bureaus, which are expressly named as eligible grantees under this bill. Without explicit coordination mechanisms, there is a risk that the Fund could inadvertently duplicate existing prevention investments rather than strategically supplement them.

Community-based youth prevention works, and Maryland should invest in it strategically. With coordination mechanisms to address duplication concerns, this bill could significantly strengthen Maryland's prevention infrastructure.

We appreciate the General Assembly's work on this important policy and welcome the opportunity to share our perspective.

Cc: