

A. Doswell Written Testimony - FAV SB 537 - Youth

Uploaded by: Ajah Doswell

Position: FAV

Bill Number & Title:	SB 537 (2026 Session) - Youth Delinquency Prevention HB 1058 (2026 Session)- Youth Delinquency Prevention Fund - Establishment
Committee:	Judicial Proceedings Budget and Taxation
Hearing Date:	February 19, 2026
Position:	Support
Submitted by:	Name: Ajah Doswell, LMSW <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-Chair, Maryland Association of Youth Service Bureaus (MAYSB) • Chief Operating Officer of The Doral Scholars Program
Affiliation:	Clinician, grant manager, and parent serving youth and families through school-based and community programs in Baltimore City and surrounding areas

Chair, Vice Chair, and members of the Committee:

My name is Ajah Doswell. I am a licensed social worker, Co-Chair of the Maryland Association of Youth Service Bureaus (MAYSB), and Chief Operating Officer of The Doral Scholars Program. My career is dedicated to serving youth and families in Baltimore City and surrounding areas through school-based programs and community interventions.

In my dual role as a clinician and administrator, I witness the full trajectory of our justice system. I see the youth we can reach early through prevention, and I see the young adults facing decades of incarceration once they are already deep in the system. I submit this testimony in **strong support of SB 537** because I see daily how consistent, intentional funding for community-based services changes lives.

The Reality on the Ground

From 2021 to 2025, I served as Program Director for KEYS Empowers, Inc., a Youth Service Bureau (YSB) in Baltimore City. Today, I continue to manage programs of "high-risk" youth, including those returning from detention.

The gap between what these young people need and what our funding structures provide is devastating. To illustrate:

- **The 16-year-old:** Last week, at a Valentine's Day event hosted by the Department of Juvenile Services (DJS) with Judge Brown, an intern met a 16-year-old boy facing 60 years in prison due to automatic adult charging.
- **The 23-year-old:** On Friday, a young man I've mentored since 8th grade, recently released from jail, texted me: *"Ms. Ajah, I'm really ready to change... I want to get my life together before I hurt someone or myself. I'm tired of the pain."*

These stories are not anomalies; they are the result of a system that meets youth *after* harm has compounded, rather than providing a safety net before the crisis.

Years ago, this General Assembly showed leadership through **Justice Reinvestment**, recognizing that reducing incarceration requires reinvesting those savings into community stability. SB 537 applies this exact principle to our youth.

From a clinical perspective, the logic is undeniable:

1. **Upstream Investment:** Supporting families early prevents escalation.
2. **Reduced Confinement:** Keeping youth out of facilities creates immediate state savings.
3. **Sustainable Cycles:** Those savings must be funneled back into YSBs and early intervention providers to break the cycle of recidivism.

The Need for Dedicated Funding

Historically, Maryland had 19 Youth Service Bureaus. Today, only **two** receive YSB funds. This decline represents a massive collapse of our state's prevention infrastructure. Without a dedicated fund:

- Programs rely on "patchwork" grants that vanish as quickly as they begin.
- Communities lose trusted, long-standing providers.
- Youth are placed on waitlists or offered fragmented, short-term help.

While agencies like DJS and DHS recognize the need for prevention, there is currently no dedicated budget line for it. Everyone acknowledges the necessity; our budget structure simply hasn't caught up.

What Effective Prevention Looks Like

We are not guessing about what works. Clinical evidence and our own practice show that success requires:

- **Trauma-Informed Care:** Addressing community violence and generational trauma.
- **Family Engagement:** Helping caregivers navigate complex systems.
- **Consistency:** Building long-term, pro-social relationships with caring adults.

In our programs, we see youth re-engage in school, reduce behavioral incidents, and set goals for employment. However, these outcomes are not the result of one-time interventions. They require the stable, relationship-based work that only a permanent funding stream can provide.

Conclusion

We have the expertise. We have the programs. What we lack is the intentional funding to ensure these services are available to every child in Maryland who needs them. SB 537 allows us to align our budget with our values by investing in the providers that keep youth out of the "deep end" of the legal system.

I respectfully urge **favorable support** of SB 537 - Youth Delinquency Prevention.

MAYSB - 2026 SB 537 FAV - Youth Delinquency Preven

Uploaded by: Ann Ciekot

Position: FAV



Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
February 19, 2026

**Senate Bill 537 - Youth Delinquency Prevention Fund - Establishment
SUPPORT**

Senate Bill 537 will create a fund for increased resources directed to community-based prevention programs, including Youth Service Bureaus, to prevent juvenile delinquency through addressing the mental health, substance use, and educational needs of youth and young adults. Funding will ameliorate conditions that contribute to delinquency, youth suicide, substance use disorder and family disruption.

The Youth Delinquency Prevention Fund is based on the Justice Reinvestment model. Justice Reinvestment is a policy approach that reallocates public funds from punitive criminal justice systems—such as youth incarceration—toward community-based services and interventions aimed at preventing crime and providing young people services to address issues such as mental health care, substance use, education, and employment. Justice reinvestment seeks to disrupt cycles of delinquency and reflects a shift toward restorative and preventive frameworks.

Maryland's practice of charging children as adults has created a costly system that impacts the Department of Juvenile Services, the Office of the Public Defender, and local detention centers.

- It costs \$1,174 each day a child is held pre-disposition, and for those held on adult charges, it amounts to nearly \$147,000 per child on average.
- Youth Service Bureaus are cost effective. For the cost of incarcerating 8 young people (estimated at \$1.7 million), YSBs can serve thousands of young people with a spectrum of services.

Savings achieved by keeping young people out of the criminal justice system, as well as other money, can be invested through this fund into services that will continue to save money and lives. The Governor's Office on Crime Prevention and Policy will administer the fund. That office already administers certain federally funded delinquency prevention grants.

We urge a favorable report on Senate Bill 537.

It's time to invest in prevention!

SB0537_MHAMD_FAV.pdf

Uploaded by: Ann Geddes

Position: FAV

SB 537 – Youth Delinquency Prevention Fund - Establishment

Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

February 19, 2026

Position: SUPPORT

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 SB 537.

SB 537 will establish a Youth Delinquency Prevention Fund to provide grants to community-based programs that provide services that have been shown to reduce delinquency in youth, including mental health treatment, substance use prevention and treatment, and youth development.

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. In addition to these mental health conditions, many juvenile offenders also have a conduct disorder or a substance use disorder.¹

Prevention strategies that address these underlying factors that can contribute to juvenile delinquency work. Youth Service Bureaus (YSBs), for example, have been shown to successfully provide juvenile justice diversion by providing mental health and substance use assessment, prevention, and treatment services. 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. The Maryland Department of Juvenile Services (DJS) evaluates Youth Service Bureaus and noted that YSBs play a unique role as trusted, community-based entities with strong ties to schools, families, and local organizations.²

YSBs have existed in Maryland for over 40 years. A decade ago, a statewide network of YSBs received State funding through the Children’s Cabinet Interagency Fund. In 2016, the priorities of the Children’s Cabinet shifted, and juvenile justice diversion programs were no longer on the

¹ Lee Underwood et.al. Mental Illness and Juvenile Offenders. International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health (2016). <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC4772248/>

² Maryland Department of Juvenile Services. Youth Service Bureaus (October, 2025). https://dlslibrary.state.md.us/publications/Exec/DJS/HU9-224_2025.pdf

menu of programs that could be funded. Being forced to rely on local funding only, many YSBs had to close or limit their services.

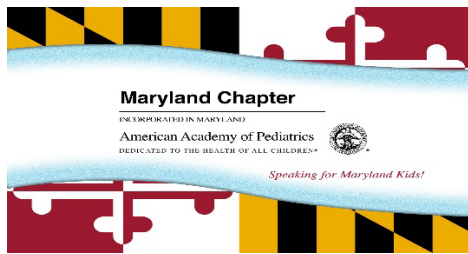
There is a potential source of ready revenue for a Youth Delinquency Prevention Fund. Passage of sensible legislation to reduce auto-charging of youth as adults for certain offenses (HB 409/SB 323) would save Maryland millions. Maryland sends more youth, ages 14-17, to adult court – automatically, without input from a judge – than any other state except Alabama. HB 409/SB 323 requires that 16- and 17-year olds charged with 12 offenses—including murder and carjacking – begin their cases in adult court. Current law encompasses 33 offenses. The bill would require that other charges start in juvenile court. DJS estimates that if the practice of automatically charging children as adults were ended, the department could reduce its average daily population by 120 children and save approximately \$17 million annually. In addition to savings achieved by a reduction in auto-charging of youth, there are significant savings to be found by keeping young people out of the criminal justice system entirely and reinvesting those dollars in prevention services. Establishing and adequately resourcing a Youth Delinquency Prevention Fund will improve the lives of countless youth and reduce juvenile crime.

For these reasons, MHAMD supports SB 537 and urges a favorable report.

SB0537_FAV_MDAAP_Youth Delinquency Prevention Fund

Uploaded by: Christine Krone

Position: FAV



Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
Senate Budget and Taxation Committee
February 19, 2026

Senate Bill 537 – *Youth Delinquency Prevention Fund – Establishment*
POSITION: SUPPORT

The Maryland Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics (MDAAP) is a statewide association representing more than 1,100 pediatricians and allied pediatric and adolescent healthcare practitioners in the State and is a strong and established advocate promoting the health and safety of all the children we serve. On behalf of MDAAP, we submit this letter of **support** for Senate Bill 537, which would create a new state special fund called the Youth Delinquency Prevention Fund to support community-based programs aimed at preventing youth delinquency and addressing related challenges.

MDAAP supports Senate Bill 537 because it invests in early, community-based interventions that improve the health and well-being of children and adolescents. Youth Service Bureaus (YSBs), which would be eligible for grants under this bill, provide critical services directly aligned with MDAAP priorities, including mental health support, substance use prevention, family counseling, and youth development programs. By strengthening YSBs and other community programs through dedicated funding, Senate Bill 537 ensures that children receive preventive care and supportive services before problems escalate, reducing the risk of delinquency and promoting healthier, more resilient youth. MDAAP recognizes that community-based prevention is essential to pediatric health, and this bill provides a sustainable mechanism to expand access to these vital services for all Maryland children. For these reasons, we urge a favorable report.

For more information call:

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Carrington 2026 Greenbelt sb537hb1058 Youth Fund T

Uploaded by: Darrell Carrington

Position: FAV



GREENBELT CITY COUNCIL

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SB0537 / HB1058 - Youth Delinquency Prevention Fund – Establishment SUPPORT

The City of Greenbelt supports SB0537/HB1058. This bill establishes the Youth Delinquency Prevention Fund to provide grants to community-based programs, including youth service bureaus, that deliver community-oriented delinquency prevention, youth suicide prevention, drug and alcohol abuse or substance use disorder prevention, youth development services, and services that address the conditions that contribute to delinquency, youth suicide, substance use, and family disruption. The fund is structured as a special, non-lapsing fund administered by the Office and supported through appropriations, interest earnings, and other sources, with expenditures made through the State budget process and subject to audit and reporting requirements.

For municipalities like Greenbelt, prevention focused investments that reduce youth involvement in the juvenile justice system, strengthen families, and expand effective community supports are practical public safety policy. Programs that intervene early, stabilize youth, and connect families to services reduce downstream costs borne by local governments and improve outcomes for young people. This bill creates a clear statewide mechanism to support those programs while ensuring accountability through regular reporting on grants, services delivered, and the populations served.

For these reasons, the City of Greenbelt respectfully requests a favorable report on SB0537/HB1058.

For more information, please contact City Manager Josué Salmerón at 301-474-8000 or jsalmeron@greenbeltmd.gov.

Submitted by Carrington & Associates, LLC on behalf of the City of Greenbelt.

MD Catholic Conference_SB 537_FAV.pdf

Uploaded by: Garrett O'Day

Position: FAV



MARYLAND
CATHOLIC
CONFERENCE

February 19, 2026

SB 537

Youth Delinquency Prevention Fund - Establishment

**Senate Budget & Taxation Committee
Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee**

Position: FAVORABLE

The Maryland Catholic Conference offers this testimony in SUPPORT of Senate Bill 537. The Catholic Conference is the public policy representative of the three (arch)dioceses serving Maryland, which together encompass over one million Marylanders. Statewide, their parishes, schools, hospitals and numerous charities combine to form our state's second largest social service provider network, behind only our state government.

Senate Bill 537 would establish a fund designed to provide grants to community-based programs, such as youth service bureaus, that offer services focused on community-oriented delinquency prevention, youth suicide prevention, and drug and alcohol abuse prevention. The fund would be administered by the Office of Social and Economic Mobility. The fund would be appropriated in the State budget and require an annual report detailing the distribution of grants, the demographics of children and families served, and any subsequent interactions those individuals have with the criminal or juvenile justice systems.

Community-based programs, including Maryland's Youth Service Bureaus, build partnerships with nonprofits, schools, faith-based organizations, and government agencies to enhance the health, safety and well-being of Maryland's children, youth and families. Specifically, Maryland's Youth Service Bureaus have successfully provided effective interventions to children and their families for decades. Among the successes are: 1.) 95% of youth served in formal counseling do not enter the youth justice system two years after ending counseling, 2.) 80% of youth assessed by Maryland's Youth Service Bureaus showed significant improvement, compared to the 60% national standard and 3.) eight dollars in additional services were leveraged for every one dollar invested by the state into Maryland Youth Service Bureaus.

In the pastoral statement *Responsibility, Rehabilitation, and Restoration: A Catholic Perspective on Crime and Criminal Justice* (2000), the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops stated, "We call upon government to redirect the vast amount of public resources away from building more and more prisons and toward better and more effective programs aimed at crime prevention, rehabilitation, education efforts, substance abuse treatment, and programs of

probation, parole and reintegration.” Additionally, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has further stated that “society must never respond to children who have committed crimes as though they are somehow equal to adults fully formed in conscience and fully aware of their actions.”

Senate Bill 537 would increase the wrap-around and preventative services desperately needed to address deficiencies in Maryland’s youth services landscape. Community-based programs are proven to help keep young people out of the criminal justice system. Maryland legislators have been claiming for years that the state should be providing greater “services” for youth, both preventatively and after they become system-involved. Accordingly, we request a favorable report for Senate Bill 537.

Health Care for the Homeless - SB 537 FAV - Youth

Uploaded by: Joanna Diamond

Position: FAV

HEALTH CARE FOR THE HOMELESS TESTIMONY
IN SUPPORT OF
SB 537 - Youth Delinquency Prevention Fund - Establishment

Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
February 19, 2026



Health Care for the Homeless supports SB 537, which would create a Youth Delinquency Prevention Fund. This bill will increase resources directed to community-based prevention programs, including Youth Service Bureaus, to prevent juvenile delinquency through addressing the mental health, substance use, and educational needs of youth and young adults. As a federally qualified health center that provides comprehensive health care and unique services and supports for young people experiencing housing instability, we are acutely aware of the need for investments in programs that divert young people from the juvenile justice system.

Health Care for the Homeless is Maryland’s leading provider of integrated health services and supportive housing for individuals and families experiencing homelessness. We deliver medical care, mental health services, state-certified addiction treatment, dental care, social services, housing support services, and housing for over 11,000 Marylanders annually at sites in Baltimore City and Baltimore County. As such, investments in similar youth delinquency prevention services as contemplated by SB 537, further the evidence-based approaches we already employ.

Health Care for the Homeless Pediatrics and Family Case Manager Natalia Suc details some the experiences her youth clients face and stresses the importance of prevention interventions:

When parents are outside the home, their children are often left alone unsupervised (inaccessible and unaffordable childcare being a key factor) without any community activities to access or a good peer support group, leading them to being out on the street becoming part of groups that are dealing or stealing property (I’ve had probably 10 cases where this is the situation).

Our children do not have easy access to therapy because either the school does not offer it (only vocational counseling) or they do not want to tell the parents that they need to talk to someone (or they just do not know they should talk to someone). There is still a lot of stigma attached to mental health and lack of funding and having to move heaven and earth to access it makes it even more difficult.

Drugs are present in a lot, if not most, of our schools, and our kids (I call our clients “our kids”) are exposed to it. From my experience, I have discovered that drugs in schools leads to a culture of drugs, which leads to dealing, which leads to money exchanges, which leads to the protection of money, which leads to assaults. It would be wonderful for our kids to have access to peer groups that can propel them towards a future and away from this pervasive harmful culture.

One of the biggest issues I see is just lack of support for youth, in general, and it would be wonderful to be able to offer them opportunities to be excited about something, as in career development and support for their future. This newer generation has become almost desensitized to dreaming about a future because they see the state of the country and the world and they see their parents, or parent, struggle with adulthood, and that creates a culture of “why even try,” so feeling supported in all aspects I think would be amazing (support is felt and excitement for their future is contagious).

Maryland has made strides in understanding that public policies addressing justice-involved youth must be approached from a restorative and preventive framework. Utilizing this proven approach, SB 537 reallocates public funds from punitive criminal justice systems for youth toward community-based services and interventions aimed at preventing crime and providing young people with the support services they need.

Maryland should invest in supports that lead children to feel, in the words of Ms. Sac, “excitement for their future.” SB 537 makes such investments and we urge a favorable report.

*Our Vision: Everyone is healthy and has a safe home in a just and respectful community.
Our Mission: We work to end homelessness through racially equitable health care, housing and advocacy in partnership with those of us who have experienced it.*

For more information about our agency, visit www.hchmd.org

SB 537_MD Center on Economic Policy_FAV.pdf

Uploaded by: Kali Schumitz

Position: FAV



FEBRUARY 19, 2026

Maryland Youth Deserve Adequate Wrap-Around Support As Opposed to Incarceration

Position Statement in Support of Senate Bill 537

Given before the Senate Judicial Proceedings and Budget and Taxation Committees

Maryland has long struggled with the issue of automatically charging youth as adults, ranking second in the country only behind Alabamaⁱ. This policy of incarcerating young people in adult prison creates constraints, both procedural and fiscal, on state agencies responsible for serving youth involved in the criminal legal system such as the Department of Juvenile Services and the Office of the Public Defender. Senate Bill 537 creates a Youth Delinquency Prevention Fund to provide grants to community-based prevention programs to prevent youth delinquency and incarceration through mental health, substance use, and educational needs. This fund will be administered by the Governor's Office of Crime Prevention and Policy who administers similar federal youth delinquency funds. **The Maryland Center on Economic Policy supports Senate Bill 537 because Maryland should invest in Prevention Services for young people to divert them from the juvenile justice system.**

Under our current system, young people involved in the juvenile justice system face difficult realities:

- Youth charged as adults and awaiting transfer decisions represented nearly 60% of DJS's detained Average Daily Population in FY24ⁱⁱ.
- Children charged as adults spend an average of 98 days longer in DJS custody awaiting disposition than children charged as juvenilesⁱⁱⁱ.

Prevention programs support young people in the communities they reside, allowing for localized intervention to issues that arise. They can connect families to needed resources or address serious issues like truancy, violence, trauma, bullying, and suicide. Youth Service Bureaus, as one example, are mandated in state law to serve youth and families by providing group and family counseling, information and referral services, crisis intervention including suicide assessments, and substance use assessments and referrals.

The Youth Delinquency Prevention Fund would be funded based on the Justice Reinvestment model, an approach to public safety that addresses alternatives to incarceration while reinvesting the cost-savings to providing community-based services aimed at crime prevention, substance use support, mental health, and education and employment opportunities^{iv}. By shifting costs away from carceral punishment, the Department of Juvenile Services estimates that:

- If the practice of charging children as adults were ended, it could save \$17 million annually^v.
- Additionally, it costs \$1,174 each day a child is held pre-disposition, and for those held on adult charges, it amounts to nearly \$147,000 per child on average^{vi}.

A fund that supports Youth Service Bureaus makes sense to ensure that the state invests in a network of programs providing these services. By directing young people toward diversion instead of incarceration, Maryland can give young people better opportunities for success. **For these reasons, the Maryland Center on Economic Policy**

respectfully requests that the Senate Judiciary Proceedings Committee make a favorable report on Senate Bill 537.

Equity Impact Analysis: Senate Bill 537

Bill summary

Senate Bill 537 increases resources directed to community-based prevention programs to prevent juvenile delinquency through addressing the mental health, substance use, and educational needs of youth and young adults. Funding will ameliorate conditions that contribute to delinquency, youth suicide, substance use disorder and family disruption.

Background

Currently, 68% of the pre-disposition population in the Department of Juvenile Services custody are young people awaiting a transfer hearing (a hearing to determine whether the case should be tried in juvenile court). Youth charged as adults face disproportionately long lengths of stay, an average of 125 days in a DJS pre-disposition facility, as opposed to the average 27 days youth charged as juveniles spend in a pre-disposition facility. The cost per day to hold a youth in a DJS pre-disposition facility per day is \$1,174.02.⁷ The average total cost for a youth charged as an adult and awaiting a transfer hearing to stay at a DJS facility is \$146,987.

Equity Implications

The racial and ethnic disparities of Maryland's adult criminal legal system mirror that of the juvenile justice system:

- 80% of incarcerated youth are Black, while only 32.7% of the state's population^{vii}.

Impact

Senate Bill 537 would likely **improve racial, economic, and gender, equity** in Maryland.

ⁱ <https://www.sentencingproject.org/policy-brief/automatically-charging-youth-as-adults/>

ⁱⁱ <https://gocpp.maryland.gov/wp-content/uploads/Youth-Charged-as-Adults-Costs.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/2025RS/fnotes/bil_0002/sb0422.pdf

^{iv} <https://gocpp.maryland.gov/wp-content/uploads/justice-reinvestment-oversight-20170828-fact-sheet.pdf>

^v https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/2025RS/fnotes/bil_0002/sb0422.pdf

^{vi} <https://gocpp.maryland.gov/wp-content/uploads/Youth-Charged-as-Adults-Costs.pdf>

^{vii} https://oag.maryland.gov/News/Documents/pdfs/MEJC_Report_2025_Executive_Summary.pdf

SB0537_FAV_City of Rockville_Youth Delinquency Prev

Uploaded by: Linda Moran

Position: FAV



Testimony of the Mayor and Council of Rockville SB 537 – Youth Delinquency Prevention Fund – Establishment SUPPORT

Good afternoon, Chair Smith and members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee. I am Rockville Associate City Manager Linda Moran, and I thank you for this opportunity. We thank Senator for sponsoring this important legislation, which aligns with the Rockville Mayor and Council's priority to advocate for youth and at-risk youth programming.

The Rockville Mayor and Council unanimously support SB 537, which establishes the Youth Delinquency Fund. This fund would provide critical resources for community-based programs serving Maryland's youth, including Youth Service Bureaus (YSBs). This fund would provide grants to support programs for delinquency prevention, youth suicide prevention, drug and alcohol abuse prevention, and youth development. The funds would also be used to improve conditions contributing to delinquency, substance abuse, and family disruption, as well as to advocate for youth needs.

The City was a partner with the State for many years, as a designated YSB, to provide delinquency prevention and intervention services based on funds from both the State and local government. Without state funding, it is now not a designated YSB, but it has continued offering the same services, with City and County funding, as the School and Community Youth Services Program (SCYS). Rockville could benefit from partnering again with the state to facilitate serving more children, youth, and families as the need continues to grow. We request that the State reinstate funding for YSBs, which is critically needed to support the well-being of our Youth.

The Rockville SCYS program is based in several schools and the community and has provided mental health services, youth development, and enrichment programs to support youth and their families. The benefits of the program include:

- Service provisions to address social isolation, academic struggles, social-emotional delays, due to the pandemic, and positive youth development.
- Youth and their families have benefited from assistance, addressing depression, anxiety, trauma, substance misuse, and mood and behavior regulation.
- Program staff have seen students succeed in their home, school, and community, who, without assistance, were losing self-esteem and struggling to have hope for success.

Senate Bill 537 represents a critical investment in early, community-based interventions that improve the health, well-being, and resilience of children and adolescents. By directing dedicated funding to these programs, this bill helps ensure that children and families have access to preventive resources and supportive services before issues escalate. For these reasons, we urge the committee to provide SB 537 with a favorable report. Thank you.

MAJR-2026-HB537-FAV.docx.pdf

Uploaded by: Lucy Kiekebusch-Steinitz

Position: FAV

Maryland Alliance for Justice Reform

Working together for a criminal justice system that better serves our communities



To: Chair Will Smith and Judicial Proceedings Committee members
From: Lucy Y. Steinitz, MAJR Executive Committee
Subject: **FAV - SB0537 - Youth Delinquency Fund - Establishment**

February 19, 2026

The Maryland Alliance for Justice Reform (MAJR) supports Senate Bill 537, which establishes the Youth Delinquency Prevention Fund. MAJR is a nonpartisan, all-volunteer organization of nearly 2,000 Marylanders committed to advancing evidence-based reforms that strengthen public safety, promote justice, and build healthier communities.

SB 537 advances a preventive, research-informed approach to public safety by investing in community-based programs that address the root causes of youth justice system involvement. The bill creates a dedicated, nonlapsing fund to support grants for delinquency prevention, youth suicide prevention, substance abuse prevention, youth development, family stabilization, and youth advocacy, prioritizing early intervention over reactive, punitive responses.

National research shows that declining crime rates across the country are attributable, in part, to sustained investments in youth delinquency prevention programs, early intervention services, and community-based supports (including findings from the CDC, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, and the National Institute of Justice). These prevention strategies reduce future justice system involvement, lower recidivism, improve long-term outcomes for young people, and enhance public safety more effectively than punishment-centered approaches. The most effective prevention programs are those that are led by peers or directly impacted individuals, especially involving youth of color (who are disproportionately represented in the delinquency system).

SB 537 also establishes strong fiscal and accountability protections by ensuring that funds are used only for their intended purposes, are supplemental to existing appropriations, and are subject to audit and transparent annual reporting. Importantly, the bill protects the fund from “reversion,” meaning that unspent funds do not disappear back into the State’s General Fund at the end of the fiscal year but remain available for future prevention grants, ensuring continuity, stability, and long-term planning. In addition, SB 537 does not add any new funding to the current fiscal year’s budget; it simply creates the legal structure and safeguards necessary for future appropriations and sustainable investment.

The most ethical, cost-effective, and public-safety-centered justice policy is prevention. For these reasons, the Maryland Alliance for Justice Reform respectfully urges a favorable vote on Senate Bill 537.

Maryland Alliance for Justice Reform, Inc.

351 Dubois Rd., Annapolis, MD 21401
Organization

www.ma4jr.org

A 501c(4) Non-profit Advocacy

SB537 Support - City of Bowie.pdf

Uploaded by: Manuel Geraldo

Position: FAV



City of Bowie

15901 Fred Robinson Way

Bowie, Maryland 20716

Support Letter for Youth Delinquency Prevention Fund

SB537/HB1038

The City of Bowie supports Senate Bill 537/ House Bill 1038 which will create a Youth Delinquency Prevention Fund. The City of Bowie believes that Maryland should invest in Prevention Services for young people to divert them from the juvenile justice system. Prevention programs, such as Youth Service Bureaus, provide important mental health, educational, and workforce development services, to assist youth and their families to be successful.

Prevention Programs are in the communities where young people live and are able to be responsive to local needs that arise. They can offer families a safe place to address difficult issues such as truancy, violence, trauma, bullying, depression and suicidal ideation. In addition, these programs are connected to other community resources and serve as a trusted resource to connect families with needed resources. Creating a Youth Delinquency Prevention Fund will allow the State to once again partner with local communities in providing these needed delinquency prevention services in our communities.

Youth Service Bureaus, as one example, are mandated in state law to serve youth and families by providing group and family counseling, information and referral services, crisis intervention including suicide assessments, and substance use assessments and referrals. A fund that supports Youth Service Bureaus makes sense to ensure that the State invests in a network of programs providing these services.

Youth Service Bureaus have proven to be successful in preventing youth referred by the Department of Juvenile Services from being re-adjudicated. Two years after YSB services, 95% of youth were not involved in the justice system. These services can help make youth justice laws effective.

The City of Bowie respectfully requests that you support SB 537/ HB 1038 to establish a Youth Delinquency Prevention Fund voting in favor of this legislation.

ACTING MAYOR H.L. Dufour Woolfley

COUNCIL Dennis Brady • Michael P. Estève • Roxy Ndebumadu • Wanda Rogers • Clinton Truesdale, Sr. **CITY MANAGER** Alfred D. Lott

City Hall (301) 262-6200 **FAX** (301) 809-2302 **TDD** (301) 262-5013 **WEB** www.cityofbowie.org

SB 537 Youth Delinquency Prevention Fund – Establi

Uploaded by: Marvin "DOC" Cheatham

Position: FAV

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Budget and Taxation Committee

Capital Budget Subcommittee
Health and Human Services Subcommittee

THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

VOTE YES ON SENATE BILL 0537

Bill Title: Youth Delinquency Prevention Fund – Establishment

Committee: Budget and Taxation Committee

Hearing Date: February 19th, 2026

Dear Chair, Vice Chair and Members of the Committee,

I respectfully submit this testimony in support of Senate Bill 537, which establishes the Youth Delinquency Prevention Fund. The fund is designed to provide grants to community-based programs that focus on delinquency prevention, youth suicide prevention, substance abuse prevention, and overall youth development.

The fund will consist of appropriations from the State budget, interest earnings, and any additional funds received for its benefit. Investing in delinquency prevention is critical, as it helps guide young people toward positive outcomes, strengthens communities, and supports the healthy development of the next generation.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Cory V. McCray".

Cory V. McCray
45th District

SB537 - Fav.pdf

Uploaded by: Neka Duckett-Randolph

Position: FAV



OUT FOR JUSTICE

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SENATE BILL 537

TO: Judicial Proceedings

FROM: Out For Justice, Inc.

DATE: 6/19/2026

Out For Justice respectfully submits this testimony in support of Senate Bill 537 and in strong support of ending the automatic charging of children as adults in Maryland. We urge this Committee to center equity, fairness, and fundamental human rights in its deliberations.

Maryland's practice of automatically charging children as adults disproportionately harms Black and Brown youth and youth from under-resourced communities. This policy treats children as if they are fully formed adults, disregarding well-established research on adolescent development and ignoring the structural inequities that shape many young people's lives. **It undermines the core principle that children are categorically different from adults and deserving of rehabilitation, not permanent punishment.**

Autocharging is not simply a procedural decision—it is a human rights issue. When a child is placed into the adult criminal legal system, they are exposed to harsher penalties, prolonged detention, and lifelong collateral consequences. Youth charged as adults spend an average of 98 additional days in custody awaiting disposition compared to youth charged in juvenile court. At a cost of \$1,174 per day, this amounts to nearly \$147,000 per child held on adult charges. Beyond the fiscal impact, these additional days represent months of missed schooling, separation from family, and exposure to trauma that can permanently alter a child's trajectory.

In Fiscal Year 2024, youth charged as adults and awaiting transfer decisions represented nearly 60% of the Department of Juvenile Services' detained average daily population. DJS estimates that ending this practice could reduce its average daily population by approximately 120 youth and save nearly \$17 million annually. These are public dollars currently spent on extended detention rather than on services that would strengthen families and communities.

The Youth Delinquency Prevention Fund established under SB 537 reflects a Justice Reinvestment approach—shifting resources away from costly, racist, punitive



systems and into community-based prevention and intervention services. Justice Reinvestment recognizes that public safety is best achieved not through automatic adult prosecution of children, but through strategic investment in mental health care, education, workforce development, and trauma-informed support.

Prevention programs are embedded in the communities where young people live. They are responsive to local needs and provide safe, trusted spaces for families to address truancy, violence, trauma, bullying, depression, and suicidal ideation. Programs such as Youth Service Bureaus—mandated under Maryland law—provide group and family counseling, crisis intervention including suicide assessments, substance use assessments and referrals, and information and referral services. **Two years after receiving Youth Service Bureau services, 95% of youth were not re-involved in the justice system.** These outcomes demonstrate that children thrive when we invest in support rather than punishment.

Equity demands that Maryland confront policies that deepen racial disparities and entrench generational harm. Human rights principles require that children be treated in ways that recognize their developmental capacity for growth and change. Fiscal responsibility demands that we redirect resources from systems that exacerbate harm to programs that prevent it.

By ending the practice of automatically charging children as adults and creating the Youth Delinquency Prevention Fund, Maryland can realign its youth justice system with evidence, equity, and basic human dignity.

For these reasons, Out For Justice respectfully urges the Committee to issue a favorable report on SB 537.

SB537 HB1058 Written Testimony 2026.pdf

Uploaded by: Rene Averitt-Sanzone

Position: FAV

Testimony in Support of HB 1058 / SB 537

Youth Delinquency Prevention Fund

Position: Support

To: Members of the House Judiciary Committee & Senate Budget & Taxation Committee

From: Rene Averitt-Sanzone, Executive Director, The Parents' Place of MD

I respectfully submit this testimony in strong support of HB 1058 / SB 537, legislation that establishes the Youth Delinquency Prevention Fund, a critical investment in Maryland's children, families, and communities.

Maryland has an opportunity to strengthen public safety and improve youth and family outcomes by reinvesting in community-based delinquency prevention services that address the root causes of system involvement—mental health needs, substance use, school disengagement, and family instability. HB 1058 / SB 537 restores the State's partnership with local communities by directing resources to proven prevention programs, including family serving organizations, that keep young people on a positive path.

Community-Based Prevention Works

Prevention programs operate in communities where youth and families live, allowing them to respond quickly and effectively to local needs. These programs provide families with trusted, accessible support for challenges such as truancy, bullying, violence, trauma, depression, and suicidal ideation, while also connecting them to broader community resources. By intervening early, prevention services reduce the likelihood that youth will enter—or reenter—the juvenile justice system.

Youth Service Bureaus and family serving organizations, which are mandated in State law, exemplify this approach. They provide group and family counseling, information and referral services, crisis intervention including suicide assessments, and substance use assessments and referrals. Investing in a stable funding stream for these services ensures that Maryland maintains a coordinated network of support for youth and families statewide.

Importantly, prevention services have demonstrated positive outcomes. Youth Service Bureaus have shown success in preventing re-adjudication for youth referred by the Department of Juvenile Services, with 95% of youth not involved in the justice system two years after receiving services. These outcomes underscore that prevention is not only compassionate policy—it is effective policy.

A Smart Use of Public Resources

HB 1058 / SB 537 is grounded in a justice reinvestment framework, which reallocates public funds from costly, punitive systems toward community-based services that prevent delinquency and improve long-term outcomes. Maryland's current practice of charging children as adults has imposed significant costs on the justice system while producing poor outcomes for youth.

Data cited in support of this bill show that:

- Ending the practice of charging children as adults could reduce the average daily population in Department of Juvenile Services custody by approximately 120 youth **and** save about \$17 million annually.
- Youth charged as adults account for nearly 60% of detained average daily population, and they remain in custody significantly longer while awaiting disposition.
- Holding a child pre-disposition costs \$1,174 per day, totaling nearly \$147,000 per child when charged as an adult.

By reinvesting savings achieved through reduced system involvement into prevention services, the Youth Delinquency Prevention Fund will save public dollars while improving safety and stability for Maryland families.

Effective Administration

The bill designates the Governor's Office of Crime Prevention and Policy to administer the fund. This office already manages federally funded delinquency prevention grants and is well positioned to oversee distribution and accountability.

Conclusion

HB 1058 / SB 537 reflects a thoughtful, evidence-based approach to youth justice—one that prioritizes prevention, strengthens families, and uses public resources wisely. By establishing the Youth Delinquency Prevention Fund, Maryland can reduce juvenile system involvement, improve outcomes for young people, and build safer, healthier communities.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge a favorable report on HB 1058 / SB 537.

Lighthouse Testimony SB 537.pdf

Uploaded by: Rosalind Ceasar

Position: FAV

Testimony for the Maryland Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

Support

February 19, 2026

SB 537- Youth Delinquency Prevention Fund - Establishment.

Lighthouse, Inc., a Maryland Youth Services Bureau located in Catonsville, supports SB 537– Youth Delinquency Prevention Fund. SB 537 establishes a Fund within the Governor’s Office of Crime Prevention & Policy (GOCPP) for community-based programs, like Youth Service Bureaus (YSBs).

Lighthouse, Inc., has been proud to serve the larger Baltimore County area for over 50 years. YSBs have been a presence in Maryland for over 40 years, providing a network of prevention services to enhance the health, safety and well-being of Maryland’s children, youth and families.

As a family counseling center, Lighthouse, Inc., provides mental health counseling services to children, youth and their families. Some common issues for which families seek help include depression, anxiety, issues related to neurodivergence, family conflict, grief and loss, and social skills. YSBs are known for providing effective mental health and prevention services. In fact, our research has found that **95% of youth** receiving counseling from a YSB have ***not*** entered the juvenile justice system two years after ending counseling.

Lighthouse, Inc., would embrace the opportunity to utilize potential funding for YSBs to further our work of preventing youth from entering the juvenile justice system through improved mental health outcomes. Lighthouse, Inc., prides itself as an organization that will never turn away a client due to inability to pay, and this commitment is made possible in part by financial support from the State.

We respectfully ask you to support this bill.

SB 537 Support, 2-17-26.pdf

Uploaded by: Timothy George

Position: FAV

CITY OF GREENBELT, MARYLAND

COMMUNITY RELATIONS ADVISORY BOARD

25 CRESCENT ROAD, GREENBELT, MD. 20770



Testimony submitted to Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

Support

February 19, 2026

SB 537- Youth Delinquency Prevention Fund - Establishment.

The City of Greenbelt supports SB 537– Youth Delinquency Prevention Fund. SB 537 establishes a Fund within the Governor’s Office of Crime Prevention & Policy (GOCPP) for community based programs, like Youth Service Bureaus (YSB). Greenbelt historically partnered with the State to fund a YSB, Greenbelt CARES, and would welcome the opportunity to re-establish this partnership to prevent delinquency.

Youth Service Bureaus have been part of Maryland’s strategy for over 40 years, to provide a network of prevention services. The network of YSBs was designed to be community based and to partner 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 of YSBs can be attributed to their prevention, community-based, family-focused approach to the development of a young person and their family’s protective factors.

Greenbelt CARES Youth Services Bureau is a department within the City of Greenbelt. It was established to provide prevention services to children, youth and their families. Greenbelt CARES is a community-oriented, family focused agency offering a variety of mental health, education, and social supports to Greenbelt and surrounding communities in Prince George’s County. CARES provides individual adult and family counseling as well as Parenting Classes and Anger Management groups. CARES offers counseling and groups in Spanish and English. CARES provides educational supports to children, teens and young adults through a GED preparation class, tutoring services, and workforce development programs. CARES goals are to help young people succeed in life, in their educational pursuits, to make families a healthy place for children and adults to grow and prosper, and to connect residents with needed resources.

Some common issues for which families seek help are: ADHD; Aggression/Anger/ Violence; Bullying; Delinquent Behaviors; Depression/ Anxiety; Family Conflict; Grief/ Loss; Parenting Concerns; Poor Decision Making; School Related Problems; Social Skills; Suicide Ideation: and Truancy.

The City, as a local government, would embrace the potential funding for Greenbelt CARES and other YSBs to further their work of preventing youth from entering the juvenile justice system.

YSBs are known for providing effective mental health and prevention services. In fact, **95% of youth** served in formal counseling by a YSB do **NOT** enter the juvenile justice system 2 years after ending counseling.

We respectfully ask you to Support this bill.

SB 537_ Youth Delinquency Prevention Fund - Estab

Uploaded by: Trudy Tibbals

Position: UNF

SB 537: Youth Delinquency Prevention Fund - Establishment: Please vote to **OPPOSE** this bill.

Dear Judicial Proceedings Committee:

I am writing to respectfully **oppose SB 537**, concerning the *Youth Delinquency Prevention Fund – Establishment*.

While the goal of reducing youth delinquency is important and widely shared, **SB 537 raises significant concerns regarding funding structure, oversight, and measurable outcomes**. Creating a new state fund without clear accountability standards and demonstrated evidence of effectiveness risks duplicating existing programs and expanding bureaucracy without guaranteeing improved results.

Maryland already allocates substantial resources toward youth services, community intervention programs, and juvenile justice initiatives. Before establishing a new fund, the State should first evaluate the effectiveness of current programs, ensure existing resources are being used efficiently, and identify specific gaps that truly require new appropriations.

SB 537 does not sufficiently demonstrate how the proposed fund will deliver measurable, data-driven improvements beyond what current programs provide. Without clearly defined performance metrics, and fiscal safeguards, taxpayers may bear additional costs without meaningful impact.

Additionally, creating a new dedicated fund can reduce legislative flexibility in future budget cycles and limit the ability to prioritize resources based on changing needs and outcomes.

Addressing youth delinquency requires thoughtful, evidence-based strategies and strong accountability—not simply the creation of another funding mechanism.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge you to **oppose SB 537**.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Trudy Tibbals

2026_02_19 SB 537 Youth Delinquency Prevention Fun

Uploaded by: Tiffany Clark

Position: INFO

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: