



THE CHOICE PROGRAM AT UMBC

THE SHRIVER CENTER

House Bill 921
Juvenile Law - Confinement and Restrictive Housing - Limitations
Judiciary Committee
February 26, 2026
Position: Favorable

The Choice Program at UMBC respectfully urges the Committee to issue a **favorable report** on House Bill 921: Juvenile Law - Confinement and Restrictive Housing - Limitation which would limit the circumstances under which an incarcerated minor may be involuntarily placed in restrictive housing.

We have served over 27,000 systems-involved Maryland youth since 1988, standing as a proven alternative to the school-to-prison pipeline. Our primary goal is the explicit and urgent reduction in the number of Black and Brown young people ensnared in the youth legal system. Our model is built to dismantle racist structures by using strengths-based approaches grounded in Positive Youth Development, holding high expectations for youth and families, and pairing those expectations with high levels of support. This work is founded on the more than century-old belief that children are categorically different from adults, and that young people should never be defined by their worst mistake. These principles are essential to addressing the deep racial inequities at both the individual and systemic levels.

The separate establishment of juvenile detention centers was originally intended as a critical legal reform: a clear acknowledgment that young people deserve a system distinct from the adult correctional model. This system was founded in 1899 on ideals of rehabilitation over punishment, viewing young people uniquely capable of change and focusing resources on essential education, counseling, and skill development. Its core functions are meant to be the protection of young people from adult influences and the delivery of age-appropriate justice that accounts for a minor's cognitive and emotional development. Furthermore, the system's aim is to prevent recidivism by addressing underlying issues like mental health, substance abuse, and family challenges, thereby promoting successful reintegration.

However, the current reality of the youth legal system proves that these foundational ideals are frequently betrayed, resulting in the disproportionate confinement and harm of Black and Brown youth as noted by the Maryland Equitable Justice Collaborative's report *Breaking the 71%: A Path Toward Racial Equity in the Criminal Legal System* (2025). The proposed legislation is therefore not just an administrative change, but a necessary measure to reclaim the original anti-punitive and rehabilitative intent of the youth legal system. By establishing that a young people may not be placed in restrictive housing for discipline, punishment, or administrative convenience, and by specifying critical protocols, this bill takes a concrete step toward dismantling one of the most punitive and isolating practices that perpetuate systemic harm and undermine the belief in a young person's capacity for positive change.

Community repair and well-being depend on a vision of safety that rejects the impulse to punish children harshly. This legislative session presents an opportunity to affirm the importance of rehabilitation and to reduce racial and ethnic disparities, particularly for children and young adults.

For the sake of Maryland's children, families, and communities, we respectfully urge this Committee to vote favorable on HB 921.

For more information contact:

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