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## House Judiciary Committee

### HB 921: Juvenile Law – Confinement and Restrictive Housing - Limitations

February 26, 2026

1:00 P.M.

#### POSITION: SUPPORT

Disability Rights Maryland (DRM) is Maryland’s state-designated Protection and Advocacy organization, empowered under state and federal law to protect individuals with disabilities from abuse, neglect and civil rights violations. Over the past decade, DRM has advocated for improved conditions for individuals with serious mental illness and other disabilities in state correctional facilities, particularly those housed on segregation (restrictive housing) units. Despite the changes to the statute banning restrictive housing for juveniles in state and local detention facilities, DRM has been alarmed to learn that youth with disabilities have been maintained in restrictive housing in facilities operated by the Department of Juvenile Services (DJS), posing a substantial risk of harm to the young person’s mental health.

DRM agrees with the positions adopted by the National Commission on Correctional Health Care (NCCHC) and the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, that the practice of restrictive housing should not be used on juveniles in corrections. Restrictive housing should never be used as a disciplinary or punitive measure under any circumstances, as a response to minor infractions, because of staffing shortages, for administrative convenience, or for retaliation. DRM supports HB 921 as a means of addressing ongoing use of restrictive housing for youth in DJS facilities.

Studies have shown that confining an individual in a room or cell for 22 hours or more per day is a harmful practice that can cause depression, trauma, paranoia, anxiety, suicidal ideation, and exacerbate existing mental illness. These risks are exacerbated for youth whose brains are still developing, and those with mental health disabilities who are at additional risk of decompensation and harm. Maximizing recreation, out of cell time, reading materials and access to education are mitigating measures whose benefits are well supported in the social science research.

The use of restrictive housing should be tracked to include monitoring for racial disparities and disproportionate use among juvenile detainees with disabilities, including mental health and developmental disabilities. Staff training around use of restrictive housing must include steps to mitigate disproportionate use for racial minorities and youth with disabilities. Finally, DRM notes that the Juvenile Justice Monitoring Unit should carefully monitor the use of restrictive housing for youth who request this placement. In our experience individuals requesting placement in restrictive housing often do so because they are in mortal fear of violence and harm from others in the

facility. DJS should take steps to enhance the safety of its facilities to ensure basic safety for youth.

Given the widespread use of restrictive housing and the well-understood negative health impacts of these practices on youth, DRM urges this committee to issue a favorable report on House Bill 921. Should you have any further questions, please contact Luciene Parsley, Litigation Director at Disability Rights Maryland, at 443-692-2494 or [lucienep@disabilityrightsmd.org](mailto:lucienep@disabilityrightsmd.org).