

To whom it may concern,

I am writing to express my strong support for the Youth Delinquency Prevention Fund. I write not only as a constituent, but as a youth pastor who works closely with young people and their families every week.

In my ministry, I see firsthand the pressures facing youth today: mental health struggles, substance use, family instability, academic stress, and profound loneliness. When those challenges go unaddressed, they can spiral into deeper crisis. But when young people are met with timely support, counseling, mentorship, and community-based services, their lives can improve dramatically.

This bill wisely invests in prevention rather than punishment. By increasing resources for community-based programs, including Youth Service Bureaus, Maryland can address the underlying causes of delinquency before young people become further entangled in the justice system. Prevention is not only more compassionate; it is more effective.

The financial data makes this even clearer. The current practice of charging children as adults has created a costly system. The Department of Juvenile Services estimates that ending this practice could reduce the average daily population by 120 youth and save approximately \$17 million annually. Administering the fund through the Governor's Office on Crime Prevention and Policy ensures experienced oversight and continuity with existing prevention efforts.

As a faith leader, I believe deeply in reconciliation, redemption, and second chances. The Youth Delinquency Prevention Fund reflects these values while also reflecting fiscal responsibility. Redirecting savings into mental health care, substance use treatment, educational support, and family services strengthens communities and enhances public safety.

Extensive criminalization and charging children as adults is not the answer to the problems youth are facing today. They are still growing, still learning, and still becoming who they are meant to be. This legislation recognizes that truth and gives our Maryland youth a better path forward.

I respectfully urge you to support this bill. Thank you for your service to our community and for your commitment to Maryland's youth.

Sincerely,

Carolyn Lawrence

Associate Pastor

Salem Lutheran Church Catonsville