

CARPE DIEM ARTS

Bringing the Arts to Life!

HB1278- Maryland Positive Youth Development Commission & Fund

Hearing before the Ways & Means Committee, March 11, 2026

Position: Favorable

Dear Chair Wilkins, Vice Chair Feldmark, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Diane Dowling, and I am Executive Director at Carpe Diem Arts, enriching the lives of youth in Montgomery County through arts programs in school, afterschool, and during the summer. We respectfully urge a favorable report on HB1278.

HB1278 creates a sustainable, youth-centered prevention strategy by establishing a Maryland Positive Youth Development Commission and a dedicated Positive Youth Development Fund within MSDE to support community-based programs serving youth from birth to 25.

This bill directly connects a growing problem — the documented harms associated with excessive and unregulated social media use — with a proven solution: structured, relationship-based youth programming.

National experts, including the American Psychological Association and the U.S. Surgeon General, have raised concerns about links between high social media use and anxiety, depression, poor sleep, and social isolation. At the same time, Maryland lacks a dedicated, sustainable funding stream for youth development programs outside school hours. High-quality afterschool, summer, and mentoring programs provide:

- Consistent, caring adult relationships that build belonging and resilience
- Safe, supervised time that reduces excessive screen use
- Social-emotional skill-building that strengthens self-regulation
- Physical activity and healthy routines that protect sleep and well-being
- Trusted mentors who help youth process harmful online content

At Carpe Diem Arts, we see these protective factors every day. For example, in our Arts for Social Change afterschool program, working with Gaithersburg High and Quince Orchard High School students at Bohrer Activity Center in conjunction with Gaithersburg Rec, we guide young people in identifying social issues of concern to them. We offer hands-on instruction in art forms historically used to convey messages of change or to inspire change or to support change (e.g. posters, dance, quilts, spoken word poetry, etc). We have used this same framework for a Teen Night Out program at Long Branch Community Center and for middle school students in Takoma Park, funded by a City grant. Working with master teaching artists, these programs foster critical thinking and encourage personal expression.

During the summer, we offer day and sleepaway camps, where students interact with their peers, build relationships, and develop social-emotional skills. Campers are active and engaged in safe, fun activities that expand their imagination without screen time.

Maryland ranks in the bottom 10 states for afterschool access. More than 567,000 Maryland children would participate in an afterschool program if one were available, yet roughly three in four are missing out — often due to cost and lack of availability.

HB1278 smartly links potential social media litigation proceeds to prevention, turning restitution into a long-term investment in youth well-being. The bill also ensures funds are supplemental and do not replace existing youth development funding.

This is a practical prevention bill. It funds what works: relationships, belonging, skill-building, and real-world engagement.

On behalf of Carpe Diem Arts and the youth we serve in Montgomery County, we respectfully urge a favorable report on HB1278.

Sincerely,



Executive Director & CFO
Carpe Diem Arts, Inc.