

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 Julia Baez, and I am the Chief Executive Officer at Baltimore's Promise. We serve Baltimore City youth through summer programs funded through our Summer Funding Collaborative. This partnership unites private and nonprofit partners in coordination with public systems to invest in diverse, high-quality opportunities that keep young people engaged and reduce summer learning loss. 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 Baltimore's Promise, we see these protective factors in action every day. Because we believe summer learning and opportunity should be supported year-round, we work to ensure young people have access to a wide range of meaningful programs. By listening to youth, families, and summer program providers across the city, we help ensure these opportunities reflect the needs and priorities of the communities we serve.

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.



Baltimore City is home to more than 80,000 school-aged children, yet there are only about 30,000 available summer program opportunities. This gap highlights a critical need, as summer programming provides young people with safe, engaging spaces beyond the school year while helping prevent summer learning loss. Despite their impact, access to these opportunities remains limited due to funding constraints.

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 Baltimore's Promise and the youth we serve in Baltimore we respectfully urge a favorable report on HB1278.

Sincerely,

Julia Baez
Chief Executive Officer
Baltimore's Promise