

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 Katherine Spinney, and I am an educator, social worker, and youth development advocate in Baltimore City. I respectfully urge a favorable report on HB1278.

HB1278 establishes the Maryland Positive Youth Development Commission and a dedicated, nonlapsing Positive Youth Development Fund within MSDE to support community-based programming for youth birth–25.

The bill reflects what public health and education leaders increasingly recognize: excessive and unregulated social media use is associated with increased risks to youth mental health, including anxiety, depression, sleep disruption, and social isolation. At the same time, Maryland lacks a dedicated, sustainable funding mechanism for prevention through youth development programming outside school hours.

Research consistently shows that protective factors — consistent adult relationships, structured time, skill-building, and opportunities for belonging — reduce risk behaviors and strengthen resilience. Afterschool programs, summer learning, mentoring, and community-based initiatives provide exactly these conditions.

Maryland continues to rank in the bottom tier nationally for afterschool access, despite strong parent demand. Without safe, supervised environments, many youth default to screens as childcare.

Research has consistently shown that effective youth programming (which requires consistent, sustainable funding), provides youth with a safe environment that helps them grow socially as well as academically, and that every dollar spent toward these programs saves \$3 in preventative costs. There is literally, unequivocally no downside to effective youth programming.

HB1278 is a smart prevention strategy. It links potential social media litigation revenue to long-term youth well-being, ensures funds are supplemental, and prioritizes meaningful youth engagement in program design.

As an education advocate, I strongly support policies that invest upstream in prevention rather than downstream in crisis response. HB1278 does precisely that.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge a favorable report.

Sincerely,

Katherine Spinney, MT, MSW
KSC