

**Testimony in Support of HB1278 / SB977  
Maryland Positive Youth Development Commission and Fund Establishment  
House Ways and Means Committee Hearing**

**March 11, 2026**

Chair Atterbeary, Vice Chair Wilkins, Delegate Smith, and Members of the House Ways and Means Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of HB1278 / SB977. I appreciate the leadership of Delegate Stephanie Smith in advancing legislation that would establish the Maryland Positive Youth Development Commission and Fund to strengthen investments in programs that support the wellbeing and healthy development of Maryland's young people.

Across the country, policymakers are increasingly examining how to address the impacts of social media and digital environments on youth mental health and development. Maryland has an opportunity to lead by ensuring that public resources and potential settlement funds tied to social media harms are directed toward solutions that strengthen youth-serving systems and expand access to evidence-based programs.

While Maryland has made significant investments in systems designed to respond to youth crisis—including the work of the Maryland Department of Juvenile Services—the state has not historically established a comparable, centrally directed funding strategy focused on prevention and positive development for school-aged children, youth, and young adults. Maryland spends \$3,000 per student on PSOEP summer supports—but over \$90,000 per youth in the juvenile justice system. HB1278 helps address this gap by creating a structure that prioritizes investments in programs that build protective factors, strengthen community supports, and promote healthy development before young people reach points of crisis. Every dollar we invest in positive youth development now saves tens of thousands later and acknowledges that our children are not problems to solve but flowers to be cultivated.

As a parent of a six-year-old and an eight-year-old, I see firsthand how important safe environments, caring adults, and positive opportunities are to children's growth and wellbeing. In addition to being a parent, I serve as a Commissioner on the Montgomery County Commission on Children and Youth and as a member of the Montgomery County African American Advisory Group. Through these roles, I regularly hear from families, community leaders, and youth-serving organizations who are calling for greater priority to be placed on developmental supports that help young people thrive in their communities. In February alone, Montgomery County saw multiple young people harmed by guns and violence on a non-school day we lost curious, 6 year old Lascelle Lee IV who shot himself in the face while he was home with no engaging child care program or afterschool day camp like my 6 year old enjoyed that day. We need more safe spaces for our children to be and grow when school session is over.

Programs that provide mentoring, afterschool and out-of-school-time learning opportunities, youth leadership development, and mental health supports are critical components of a

comprehensive youth development, school and community safety systems. These types of investments strengthen resilience, improve educational outcomes, and help young people navigate the challenges of today's digital and social environment. They have a greater return on investment than the one 24-hour system that we fund for youth 365 days a year without fail, the juvenile justice system.

HB1278 establishes a thoughtful framework to ensure that future resources can be directed toward these kinds of community-based strategies. By creating the Maryland Positive Youth Development Commission and Fund, the General Assembly can help ensure that youth-serving organizations, families, and young people themselves have a voice in shaping how investments are made and how programs are expanded across the state.

Maryland has long been a national leader in education and youth development. This legislation offers an opportunity to build on that leadership by establishing a coordinated approach to investing in the healthy development of our children and adolescents.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Committee to issue a favorable report on HB1278 / SB977.

Thank you for your consideration and for your continued commitment to Maryland's young people.

Sincerely,

Shané Tate Pimentel

Board Chair, Maryland Out-of-School-Time Network  
Founder, Six Tool Solutions