



HB1278- Maryland Positive Youth Development Commission & Fund
Hearing before the Ways & Means Committee, March 11, 2026
Informational

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

My name is Sue Fothergill, and I am a Senior Fellow in Baltimore City, MD.

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 parents, caregivers, 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 such as consistent adult relationships, engaging enrichment 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. They are also evidence-based strategies to increase attendance. Young people engaged in programming come to school more often, even after experiencing high levels of absenteeism prior to being involved in programming. It both reduces and mitigates risk.

It is very unfortunate for Maryland school children that Maryland continues to rank in the bottom tier nationally for afterschool access, despite strong parent demand, and the clear and exceptional benefits. This bill is simply common sense. It links potential social media litigation revenue to long-term youth well-being.