

## HB1278 Testimony Letter

### **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 Tiana Massaquoi, youth development advocate, Co-Board Chair for Keep Still Cares Foundation, and Technical Assistance Consultant for MENTOR Maryland DC. Additionally, I am the Chair of the Education Commission of the City of Frederick, Maryland. 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.

This past January, I co-organized the Key City Youth Summit with local youth, a three-day youth-led gathering in Frederick focused on mentorship, civic engagement, and leadership development. The youth and mentors who participated demonstrated precisely the outcomes research predicts. Young people who experienced consistent mentoring relationships, structured skill-building workshops in civic engagement and personal development, and authentic opportunities to contribute to community planning left the summit with renewed sense of purpose and agency. Mentors reported that even this brief, intensive experience of belonging within a supportive community shifted young people's trajectories and aspirations. Without comparable access to such programming year-round, we forfeit these transformative moments.

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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,

Tiana Massaquoi

*Co-Board Chair*, Keep Still Cares Foundation

*Technical Assistance Consultant*, MENTOR Maryland DC

*Chair, Education Commission*, City of Frederick

*Board of Directors*, Eliza's House, Washington County, Maryland