

**Testimony in Support of HB1278
Maryland Positive Youth Development Commission and Fund**

March 9, 2026

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Erin Hodge-Williams. I am a social worker and the former Executive Director of Higher Achievement in Baltimore City, a youth-serving organization that provides academic enrichment and mentoring for middle school students.

Through my work, I have seen firsthand the profound impact that high-quality education and enrichment programs can have on young people and their communities. When young people are given access to mentoring, academic support, and safe spaces to grow, they build confidence, strengthen their skills, and develop a sense of possibility about their futures.

Investments in positive youth development programs are not only beneficial for young people—they are also fiscally responsible. Research consistently shows that every dollar invested in youth development returns multiple times that amount in long-term savings by reducing the need for costly interventions such as crime prevention, incarceration, and health services related to untreated physical and mental health challenges.

Beyond being a sound financial investment, these programs reflect something even more fundamental: what all young people deserve. Every child should have access to the opportunities, support, and encouragement they need to grow, thrive, and contribute to their communities.

HB1278 would help strengthen and expand these opportunities for youth across Maryland.

I respectfully urge the committee to **vote favorably on HB1278.**

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Erin Hodge-Williams, LCSW-C

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