

**HB1278- Maryland Positive Youth Development Commission & Fund**  
**Hearing before the Ways & Means Committee, March 11, 2026**  
**Position: Favorable**

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

Dear Chair Person, Vice Chair Person, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Rennett Bennett-Burden, and I am a parent, grandparent, and caregiver of both a 9-year-old and 18-year-old child in COUNTY. I am writing to ask you to support HB1278.

Like many families, we are navigating the realities of social media. It is part of our children's world. While it can have benefits, I have seen firsthand how too much screen time can impact sleep, mood, confidence, and real-life connections.

What has made the biggest difference for our family is access to summer programming and mentoring programs that support our youths development. These programs give my child:

- Safe, supervised time after school
- Positive adult role models
- Real friendships and teamwork experiences
- Physical activity and structured routines
- Confidence and skills that build resilience

Over the years, some community-based programs (KEYS Empowers, Baltimore Brothers, and my local Mayors Office programs) have helped my family keep the young people in our family safe and engaged in positive activities when our neighborhoods are full of opportunities for them to get into trouble. My son, who is now away completing his freshman year at a local Maryland school, was provided mentoring and support that he needed to keep him focused while he was in school. My granddaughter's father recently returned to the community and was able to get resources, referrals, and some services from KEYS Empowers to help him settle back into his role as a active dad at the age of 23.

Not every family has access to programs like this. Cost and availability are real barriers. When safe, structured options are not available, screens often become the default.

HB1278 creates a dedicated fund to support community-based youth development programs across Maryland. It is a practical prevention bill. Instead of only responding to the harms of social media, it invests in real-world spaces where young people can build relationships, develop skills, and thrive.

As a parent/caregiver, I know how important it is to have supportive environments beyond the school day. This bill helps expand those environments statewide.

For the well-being of Maryland's children and families, I respectfully urge a favorable report on HB1278.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,  
Rennett Dani Bennett-Burden  
Baltimore County formerly Baltimore City