

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 Emily Morrison, and I am a youth worker who is grateful to pour my life energy into our youth here in Maryland. I am writing to ask you to support HB1278. I am the Director of Programs and Community Life at VineCorps in Prince George's County, a small but mighty community-based nonprofit.

Like many organizations, our nonprofit, VineCorps, is dedicated to our youth and helping them become positive, thriving members of our community. However, we always face the issue of more students than we can help with limited funding. 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.

I have seen an incredible difference in so many of our teenagers who attend one of our programs, whether it is our afterschool, weekend, or summer programs. We even put on special community service project programs and are doing one this weekend doing trash cleanup in our students' neighborhood so they can earn their service hours for graduation. But it's more than just service - it's time spent with caring, non-parent adults, who can make SUCH a huge difference for teenagers who need positive adult role models.

Here's a favorite story of a change from last school year to this one: *Last year G.H. was struggling academically and failing more than one class. She was referred to us (VineCorps) who conducted an intervention called a Student Check Up with her, using motivational interviewing techniques to find out more. We found out G.H. had been vaping a lot and begun trying marijuana, and her parents were fighting. VineCorps staff talked to her about her goals for her life, how her schoolwork fit into those goals, the impact of vaping on concentration, and how she and her siblings were feeling about their family situation. The staff suggested some different ways of approaching schoolwork and offered resources for her related to homework, substance use, and family support. Now G.H. is earning Bs, she is participating in VineCorps' afterschool program for homework and self-esteem support, and she has clearer goals for herself and what she wants. She said, "I wasn't sure about the Student Check Up at first, but it turned out to be really helpful to have VineCorps' support in making changes to raise my grades."*

I know this student personally and love seeing her at our program every week! Not every student has access to programs like this. Cost and availability are real barriers. When safe, structured options are not available, screens often become the default. So many of our students report screens really impact them negatively, but they can't stop using them for upwards of eight hours a day.

As a youth service provider, I know it is crucial to have supportive environments beyond the school day. This bill helps expand them statewide. For the well-being of our children and families, I respectfully urge a favorable report on HB1278. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Emily Morrison from Hyattsville, MD, Prince George's County