



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

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The Maryland Out of School Time Network (MOST) is a statewide organization dedicated to closing opportunity gaps by expanding the quantity and quality of afterschool and summer learning opportunities for young people. MOST also serves as the backbone organization for the Maryland Coalition for Community Schools and MENTOR Maryland | DC.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in strong support of House Bill 1278. We are proud to have worked with Delegate Stephanie Smith on this legislation and grateful for her leadership in bringing it forward.

Much of the current conversation in Annapolis about social media and youth focuses, appropriately, on the design of platforms themselves: the algorithmic features, the addictive mechanics, the content that reaches young people before anyone can intervene. That upstream work matters. But HB1278 addresses a different and equally important question: what are young people doing with the hours outside of school, and do they have meaningful alternatives to screens in the first place? The answer to that question shapes how vulnerable young people are when they encounter harmful content, and how resilient they are when they do.

The research is clear that the harms of social media are not evenly distributed. Young people who have consistent relationships with caring adults, positive peer groups, and structured activities outside of school are better protected. They have somewhere to be, something to do, and someone to talk to when the online world gets dark.

The American Academy of Pediatrics, in its recent policy statement on children and digital ecosystems, puts investment in these "third spaces" first among its recommendations, noting that in-person community environments can effectively crowd out digital overuse. The American Psychological Association's health advisory on adolescent social media use similarly finds that risk is lower when social media supplements offline connections rather than replacing them. HB1278 is an investment in exactly that offline connection.

The bill creates the Maryland Positive Youth Development Commission and a dedicated, nonlapsing fund to support afterschool, summer, mentoring, and community-based programming for young people from birth to age 25. Critically, it links a source of funding to the problem it is designed to address: revenue from any state judgments or settlements involving social media companies found to have harmed youth would flow directly into this fund. That is a thoughtful and appropriate use of restitution dollars, turning accountability into long-term public investment in young people.

**Maryland Out of School Time Network / Maryland Coalition for Community Schools/ MENTOR Maryland|DC**

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Maryland needs this. Despite being one of the wealthier states in the nation, Maryland consistently ranks among the bottom 10 states for after-school access. Parents of more than 567,000 children and youth in Maryland report wanting their child in an afterschool program, and approximately three in four of those children are not able to participate. Demand has only grown. That gap represents not just a missed opportunity but a real risk, because unsupervised, unstructured time is exactly when excessive and unsupervised screen use takes hold.

The equity dimensions here are significant. Families with fewer resources and fewer safe options afterschool are the most likely to have screens fill that gap by default. Afterschool Alliance data consistently show that Black and Hispanic families face the greatest barriers to program access, with cost being the most frequently cited obstacle. A statewide grant program that reaches community-based organizations, local governments, and schools serving these families is not a peripheral benefit. It is the core of what makes this bill meaningful.

The fund is structured well. It caps administrative and capacity-building costs at 10%, ensures grant dollars are supplemental rather than a replacement for existing funding, and includes meaningful youth engagement in the commission's work. The intent is clear, and the design is sound.

We urge the committee to give HB1278 a favorable report. Building a Maryland where every young person has access to the relationships, activities, and community that help them thrive is not only good prevention — it is the right investment in our collective future. We thank Delegate Smith for her vision and commitment in bringing this bill forward.

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