



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 Robin Truiett-Theodorson and I am the Executive Director at Banner Neighborhoods Community Corporation serving **180** youth in Baltimore City through our youth sports (9-13) and teen workforce (in high school) programs. We respectfully urge a favorable report on HB1278.

HB1278 creates a sustainable, youth-centered prevention strategy by establishing a Maryland Positive Youth Development Commission and a dedicated Positive Youth Development Fund within MSDE to support community-based programs serving youth from birth to 25.

This bill directly connects a growing problem — the documented harms associated with excessive and unregulated social media use — with a proven solution: structured, relationship-based youth programming.

National experts, including the American Psychological Association and the U.S. Surgeon General, have raised concerns about links between high social media use and anxiety, depression, poor sleep, and social isolation. At the same time, Maryland lacks a dedicated, sustainable funding stream for youth development programs outside school hours. High-quality afterschool, summer, and mentoring programs provide:

- Consistent, caring adult relationships that build belonging and resilience
- Safe, supervised time that reduces excessive screen use
- Social-emotional skill-building that strengthens self-regulation
- Physical activity and healthy routines that protect sleep and well-being
- Trusted mentors who help youth process harmful online content

At Banner Neighborhoods, we see these protective factors every day. Banner offers afterschool, weekend, and summer learning experiences for approximately 180 neighborhood children and youth per year, helping them develop life skills that they rarely learn in school. Some of the programs use sports and physical activity as vehicles for teaching these young people about teamwork, self-discipline, friendships, and healthy habits of mind and body. Older youth also get assistance with life, career and college planning through hands-on instruction and real-life work experiences. Programs include:

- *Banner Community Sports League:* Youth in grades 4-8 participate in clinics, practices, and competitions in basketball, soccer, and track throughout the school year. At the same time, they learn to follow rules, respect authority, set goals, solve problems, and maintain a positive attitude.
- *Banner Summer Sports Camp:* Youth get to “sample” tennis, lacrosse, field hockey and other sports while learning life skills and reducing summer learning loss.

- *Engaging Youth in Sports*: This afterschool program teaches sedentary students about the value of physical activity and exposes them to a variety of activities they could enjoy for a lifetime.
- *Youth Workforce Development*: Youth ages 14-21 years participate in activities that support higher achievement in education and career. Banner offers three 12-week sessions of job readiness and workforce training, serving fifty young people during the school year.
- *YouthWorks*: Banner serves anywhere between 20 and 40 youth in partnership with the YouthWorks program of the Mayor's Office of Employment Development (MOED) during the summer depending on funding.

Maryland ranks in the bottom 10 states for afterschool access. More than 567,000 Maryland children would participate in an afterschool program if one were available, yet roughly three in four are missing out — often due to cost and lack of availability.

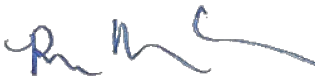
HB1278 smartly links potential social media litigation proceeds to prevention, turning restitution into a long-term investment in youth well-being. The bill also ensures funds are supplemental and do not replace existing youth development funding.

This is a practical prevention bill. It funds what works: relationships, belonging, skill-building, and real-world engagement.

On behalf of **Banner Neighborhoods** and the youth we serve in Baltimore City we respectfully urge a favorable report on HB1278.

Sincerely,

Robin Truiett-Theodorson



Executive Director