

October 21, 2024

Governor Wes Moore
100 State Circle
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Governor Wes Moore,

We, the undersigned 118 signatories, are concerned about recent sensationalized media coverage surrounding a small number of high profile cases, which continue to drive harmful narratives. We worry that these narratives will result in reflexive, overly punitive and ineffective policy responses for addressing crime involving young people. We worry for good reason as this has already begun. In light of this, we are writing to express our strong support for your administration to stay the course in implementing a research-backed, equitable, community-centered approach. This includes expressing our strong support of Department of Juvenile Services Secretary Vincent Schiraldi. Secretary Schiraldi has brought much needed subject-matter expertise and rigorous managerial oversight to a key state agency that was allowed to decay as a result of the previous gubernatorial administration's chronic neglect and poor allocation of resources. Many of us are longstanding professionals in the youth justice, violence prevention, victim services and related fields, and we are confident in Secretary Schiraldi's vision for repairing DJS. We believe that he will continue to implement the necessary strategies to achieve true community safety, which is precisely what this crucial state agency needs at this time.

Ensuring community safety is a top government responsibility, and of deep concern to us all. Like all Maryland residents, we are troubled whenever we learn that a young person is accused of breaking the law—and we are especially concerned about the welfare of anyone who has been harmed by a young person's actions. It is precisely because of these concerns, not in spite of them, that we adamantly oppose misguided policies designed to be “tough” on kids but which do not align with true accountability, the fair administration of justice, or what we know from the research actually works.

Twenty years of research and experience across our diverse disciplines have shown unequivocally that over-reliance on incarceration and punitive approaches, including unnecessary incarceration for young people, increases their risk of reoffending, including for more serious crime going forward. This ineffective and costly approach also erodes systemic legitimacy, and continues to drive the extreme racial disparities in Maryland's youth justice system, including sending more children to be tried in adult court than any other state in the nation besides Alabama. 81% of these children are Black.

Real and lasting safety can be accomplished only by strengthening communities, supporting the conditions for true accountability, addressing trauma in order to change behavior, and providing meaningful support and services to youth and their caregivers. Under Secretary Schiraldi, DJS

has begun demonstrating a long-overdue commitment to implementing these kinds of evidence-based best practices, which will take steadfast commitment, and which is key to the success of your administration's "all of the above" strategy. The award-winning Thrive Academy, which is successfully reducing gun violence among the highest-risk youth under DJS care, is a prominent example of this approach in application.

As policy experts, practitioners on the front lines of these challenges, youth-serving organizations, faith leaders, victim service providers, youth advocates, violence reduction specialists, and community leaders, we know how important it is to invest in the changes and long-term investments that are needed to see all our children, families, and communities succeed, and to ensure the equitable approach that Marylanders deserve. We believe in and share your commitment to being data-driven and heart-led, especially in the face of misguided and politicized attacks which undermine this work. We offer our expertise, perspective, and partnership in meeting with members of the media, State's Attorneys Association, or others surrounding best practices in this work. We have confidence in your leadership as Governor, and faith in Secretary Schiraldi, to build an approach to youth justice that both improves community safety, and achieves better outcomes for kids.

Sincerely,

Organizations

Maryland Youth Justice Coalition

ACLU of Maryland

A Mothers Cry

Advance Maryland

Baltimore Algebra Project

Baltimore Brothers

Baltimore City Moms Demand Action

Baltimore Peace Movement

Beats Not Bullets

Bridge Maryland, Inc.

Campaign for the Fair Sentencing of Youth

Carroll County Youth Service Bureau

Catalyze Justice

Center for Criminal Justice Reform,
University of Baltimore School of Law

Center for Emerging Media

Center for Juvenile Justice Reform at
Georgetown University's McCourt School of
Public Policy

The Choice Program at UMBC

Color of Change

Criminal Defense and Advocacy Clinic,
University of Baltimore School of Law

The Ford Group

Fair and Just Prosecution

Free Minds Book Club and Writing
Workshop

Human Rights for Kids

Jews United for Justice

Justice Policy Institute

Keys Empowers

Leaders of a Beautiful Struggle
Let's Thrive Baltimore
Lighthouse Youth and Family Services
MAYSB Maryland Association of Youth
Services Bureaus
Maryland Catholic Conference
Maryland Center on Economic Policy
Marylanders to Prevent Gun Violence
Mental Health Association of Maryland
NAACP Howard County
National Youth Justice Network
Out for Justice, Inc.
Racial Justice NOW

The Rebuild, Overcome, and Rise (ROAR)
Center at University of Maryland Baltimore
Sayra & Neil Meyerhoff Center for Families,
Children and the Courts, University of
Baltimore School of Law
Pennsylvania Avenue Neighborhood
Association
Sasha Bruce Youthwork, Inc.
Showing Up for Racial Justice Baltimore
(SURJ Baltimore)
University of Maryland PROGRESS
Initiative (Prevent Gun Violence:Research
Empowerment Strategies and Solutions)
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