

December 8, 2025

Governor Wes Moore
100 State Circle
Annapolis, MD 21401



Dear Governor Moore:

The Maryland Youth Justice Coalition (MYJC) and its partners, friends, and constituents are profoundly disturbed by reports that, amidst wintry weather and freezing outdoor temperatures, the Youth Detention Facility (YDF) in downtown Baltimore, operated by the state's Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services (DPSCS), is housing children and compelling staff to work without a functioning heating system.

Whenever government authorities deem public safety requires them to deprive an individual of their liberty, they assume full and complete responsibility for that human's well being. This is a solemn responsibility that should never be made lightly. It is therefore unconscionable that youth and children at the YDF, a pretrial facility where young people are detained prior to any determination of guilt or delinquency, should be subjected to this level of neglect.

As an employer, the state also has an obligation to provide staff working at YDF and in other DPSCS facilities a safe, fair and comfortable work environment.

The reported lack of heat at YDF raises troubling larger questions about the state's commitment to the health and safety of youth in its care. Are these young people receiving adequate physical and mental health services? Are they provided adequate opportunities for education, exercise, and appropriate socialization? We are deeply concerned that conditions for these youth, who are in the custody of the state's adult correctional system largely due to Maryland's draconian autocharging laws, may be falling short in multiple ways of even the minimum standards set by the state's Department of Juvenile Services.

We call upon DPSCS Superintendent Carolyn Scruggs to immediately ensure that youth and staff in this facility are safe, warm, and subject to conditions that are appropriate for youth and children.

Further, we call upon Governor Moore, as the state's chief executive, to provide close oversight of this effort and to take appropriate action to end unnecessary incarceration of young people—especially in the adult correctional system. This includes supporting changes in state laws that require children and youth charged with certain crimes to be prosecuted as if they were adults when the overwhelming majority of those children's charges are dropped or they end up back in juvenile detention.

Maryland, like every other state, has a separate justice system for young people. The mandate of these youth justice systems is to focus on rehabilitation rather than punishment and emphasize individualized assessment of each youth's case and circumstances to ensure they receive an intervention that prepares them to thrive without future contact with law enforcement. Regrettably, Maryland continues to circumvent these common protections through outdated autocharging laws that require youth to be placed in the adult criminal justice system based solely on the charge against them. As a result, our state charges more youth as adults than every state but Alabama and we are out of compliance with federal standards that require separating youth from adults within facilities.

Governor Moore and Secretary Scruggs, our state has a shameful history of neglecting young people accused of breaking the law—especially children of color, who represent over 90% percent of autocharged youth, over 80% of whom are Black children. Children should not be housed in facilities without heat, and they should not be denied rehabilitative support and services that could prepare them for safe and productive lives in the community. Similarly, people who work in these facilities deserve to be treated with dignity and respect.

We call upon you to recognize the profound unmet needs and obligations exposed by this crisis, and to use your authority and influence to support safety, labor, and the promise of youth—which includes ending the practice of automatically charging children and youth in the criminal justice system for adults.

Sincerely,

Maryland Youth Justice Coalition

Members:

ACLU of Maryland

Advance Maryland

Baltimore Algebra Project

Baltimore Legal Action Team (BALT)

Baltimore Jewish Council

Baltimore Youth Arts

BRIDGE Maryland, Inc.

The Choice Program at UMBC

Disability Rights, Maryland

Free State PTA

Human Rights for Kids

Jewish Community Relations Council
(JCRC) of Greater Washington

Jews United for Justice

Maryland Catholic Conference

Maryland Center on Economic Policy

Maryland Association of Youth Service
Bureaus

Mental Health Association of Maryland

National Council of Jewish Women,
Maryland State Policy Advocacy
Network

No Boundaries Coalition

Out for Justice

R Street Institute

The Rebuild, Overcome, and Rise (ROAR)
Center at UMD, Baltimore

The Sayra and Neil Meyerhoff Center for
Families, Children and the Courts

The Sentencing Project

Young People for Progress

Youth As Resources (YAR)