

MARYLAND YOUTH JUSTICE COALITION

February/March 2026 Newsletter

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MARYLAND YOUTH
JUSTICE COALITION

Welcome to the February/March 2026 MYJC newsletter! Each month we assemble all the latest need-to-know news about MYJC and what's happening for youth across Maryland. Please share your community events, local news, needs, and actions with us by emailing gail@advancemaryland.org. Feel free also to forward this newsletter with your network and encourage them to sign up to receive their own copy [here](#).

Did you miss our previous newsletters? Find all of our newsletters [here](#).

Not yet a member of MYJC? Email gail@advancemaryland.org today to join.

HIGHLIGHTS

First of all, **we want to thank everyone who came to our Youth Justice Lobby Night on February 2nd!** We had over 100 participants and the voices of directly impacted teens, family members, and advocates had a powerful impact on legislators.



Photo: Participants of MYJC Lobby Night holding signs that say "Kids Can't Wait" and "Youth Justice Reform Now"

We had over two dozen scheduled lobby visits and our coalition members from the Eastern Shore to western and southern Maryland made sure to also engage in drop-offs of our literature making it clear that autocharging kids as adults has no reason to continue in Maryland.



Photo: MYJC youth leaders meet with Senate President Bill Ferguson during Lobby Night

We want to express our gratitude to all of the individuals and organizations that made sure we will make historic progress on our efforts this session, with a particular thanks to Youth As Resources, UMBC Choice Program, Jews United for Justice, Baltimore Algebra Project, and The Sentencing Project.

RECAP

After 14 years of not receiving a vote in any committee, legislation to reform automatic charging of youth has passed the Senate. While a number of weakening amendments were adopted, this is still significant progress. Two important amendments supported by MYJC were also adopted 1) the text of SB 296 was added to the bill, which ensures youth will not be held in adult jails after 2029 and 2) required annual reporting by DJS and GOCPP, and an annual report on implementation of the new law by the Commission on Juvenile Justice Reform. The final version of the Senate bill, [SB323](#) can be found [here](#), and a chart comparing current law with the amended Senate bill can be found [here](#). The House

has not yet voted on the House bill or the amended Senate bill. We must do everything we can to ensure the strongest version of this bill passes. **There is still time to tell your legislator to pass the Youth Charging Reform Act (SB323/HB409).** [Click here](#) to send a letter.

Along with the hundreds of letters our coalition members have sent directly to legislators, we have packed the room for the hearings at both the House and Senate, along with providing powerful testimony. Many thanks to those who joined us!



Photo: MYJC members gathered for Youth Charging Reform Act hearings

The Senate Judicial Proceedings Hearing held a hearing on SB323 on February 4th. Find the recording [here](#).

The House Judiciary Committee hearing on HB409 was on February 12th and its recording can be found [here](#).

We are also tracking other youth justice bills throughout session in the MYJC bill tracker, which is updated at the beginning of each week. **Our MYJC tracker can be found [here](#).**

AHEAD

Stay connected with us throughout the legislative session by following us on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), and [Bluesky](#), and keep an eye out for our monthly newsletters for the latest updates and action opportunities, a few of which are below:

1. We have a new action alert focused on getting the House to move the bill ASAP. Please send and share [this link](#) or bit.ly/CareNotCages26
2. We have a special social media toolkit for the YCRA that can be found [here](#).
3. **THIS Wednesday 3/25**, join us at Lawyer's Mall from 9:30-10 am to wave signs and encourage our House members to vote for the bill.

IN THE NEWS

Session/Bill Updates

Senate passes (updated version of) Youth Charging Reform Act: Coverage from [WMAR](#), [Daily Record](#), [Maryland Matters](#), [Baltimore Banner](#), [Baltimore Sun/MSN](#)

Maryland Senate Gives Initial Approval to Bill Limiting Youth Autocharging. After over a decade of attempts, an effort to reduce the amount of crimes eligible for the automatic charging of youths as adults is on track to pass in the Maryland Senate. Chair of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee Will Smith (D-Montgomery County) is spearheading the Youth Charging Reform Act, but the senator had to make some compromises to get the proposal out of committee. More from [WYPR](#), [Daily Record](#). (March 4, 2026)

Maryland Senate committee advances watered-down version of Youth Reform Act for consideration. Legislation changing the way juveniles can be charged advanced on Friday at the Maryland State House. It comes as a Senate committee voted, 10-1, to send the Youth Charging Reform Act to the full Senate for consideration. More from [WBAL](#), [Maryland Matters](#), [Baltimore Sun/Yahoo](#). (February 27, 2026)

Maryland lawmakers revisit reform for juvenile automatic charging. State's Attorney Ivan Bates says that's a bad idea. Bates joins Midday to discuss his opposition to the bill, as

well as his ongoing and very public dispute with Mayor Brandon Scott over the Mayor's Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement, or MONSE. [Listen here.](#) (February 19, 2026)

Legislative Black Caucus embraces Youth Charging Reform Act. The Maryland Legislative Black Caucus, representing the most powerful voice in Annapolis, released its list of priorities, one of which includes the Youth Charging Reform Act. "This bill will require that these individuals start their process in juvenile court, and they will be under the jurisdiction of the juvenile justice system," said Anne Arundel County Delegate J. Sandy Bartlett, D-District 32. [More from WBAL here.](#) (February 12, 2026)

Senate Judicial Proceedings Hearing on SB323: Coverage from [Daily Record](#), [WYPR](#), and [Maryland Matters](#).

General News

When Baltimore teens gather outside, arrests and curfews often follow. Does it help? Crowds of youth are a hallmark of spring across Baltimore, but outdoor access shrinks every year. [Read on from the Baltimore Banner.](#) (March 14, 2026)

Maryland Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs released updated student recommendations on how the state's schools can support LGBTQ students. The updated 16-page document outlines eight "actionable recommendations" for Maryland schools, supplemented with data and links to additional resources. [Read about the recommendations from Watermark Out News here.](#) (March 6, 2026)

Maryland lawmakers on track to confirm new DJS secretary following departmental turmoil. After serving as acting DJS secretary since June of last year following the resignation of Vincent Schiraldi, Betsy Fox Tolentino is on her way to becoming the official secretary of Maryland's Department of Juvenile Services (DJS) after a Senate confirmation hearing on Monday. [More from WYPR here.](#) (February 24, 2026)

Bill calls for forensic survey of land at former reform school where Black youth are buried. A commission would also research history, deaths at former site. [Maryland Matters gives you the scoop, here.](#) (February 19, 2026)

Grant fuels push to investigate Maryland's reform school for Black boys. The Maryland Department of Juvenile Services was awarded a \$200,000 grant to begin searching for the remains of hundreds of boys in the woods near the Cheltenham Youth Detention Center, the first step toward formal recognition of the boys' deaths. Funds will pay for a ground-penetrating radar survey and restoration of the cemetery grounds, according to the Maryland Historical Trust. [Read more from Baltimore Fishbowl.](#) (February 18, 2026)

Maryland Human Services Secretary Rafael López resigns amid agency turmoil, leaving behind an agency racked in the past year by the death of a foster child in state care, unsafe

placement of foster children, fiscal challenges and oversight failures identified in audits. In a statement Monday from Gov. Wes Moore's (D) office, López said he is resigning effective Monday, Feb. 23, for "health-related reasons." DHS Deputy Secretary Gloria Brown Burnett will serve as interim secretary until April 1, when former Baltimore County Administrative Officer Stacy L. Rodgers will take over as acting secretary. [More from WTOP here.](#) (February 17, 2026)

Maryland corrections officer indicted for alleged assault of juvenile in custody. Officer Dewaun Gough is facing charges of second-degree assault, misconduct in office and submitting a false statement, according to State's Attorney Ivan Bates. "These charges allege a serious breach of trust by an individual who was responsible for the care and safety of a young person in custody," Bates said in a statement. "Juveniles housed at our Juvenile Justice Center are among the most vulnerable and at-risk members of our community. They deserve to be treated with dignity, respect, and humanity at all times." [Read more from CBS News here.](#) (February 17, 2026)



UPCOMING EVENTS

2026 United for Justice (UFJ) Advocacy Day

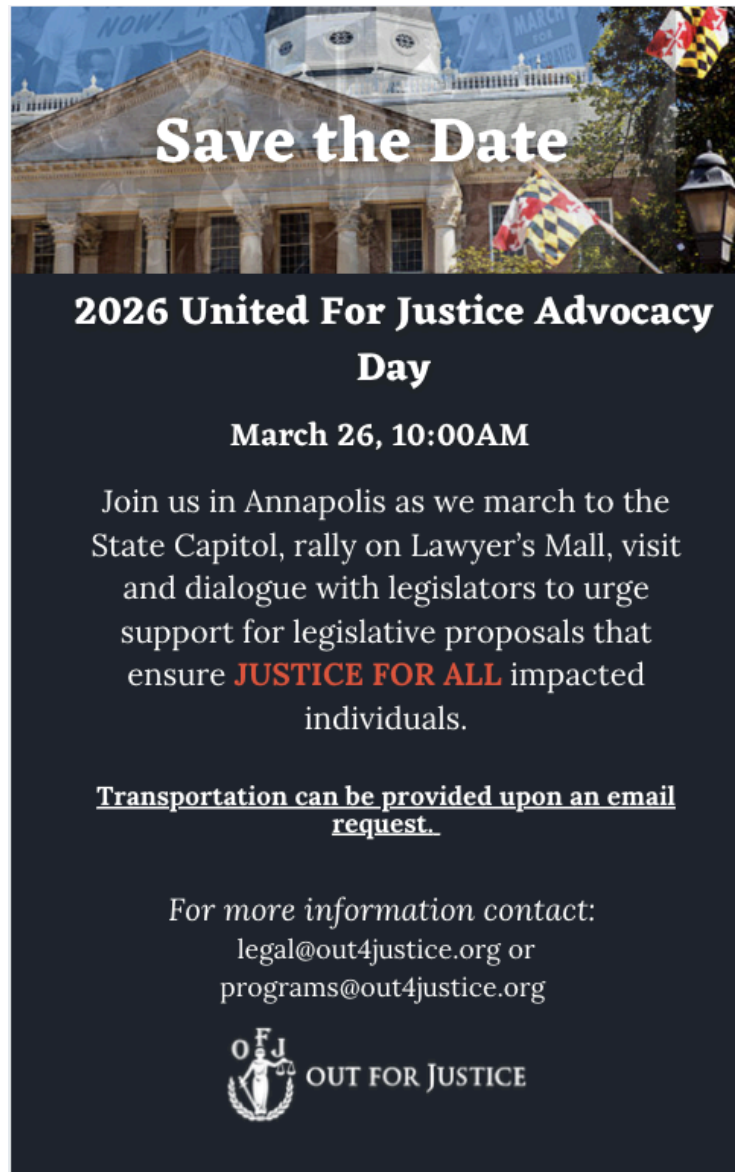
Thursday, March 26, 10AM

Annapolis

Out For Justice formally invites you and your members to partner with us for the 2026 United for Justice (UFJ) Advocacy Day,

where we rally in front of the Maryland State House to advocate around key issues, including housing, reentry, incarceration, youth justice, expungement, sentencing, child support reform, civic engagement, environmental justice, and more. In the weeks leading up to the event, partners will join brief weekly coordination meetings to finalize messaging, legislative visits, and logistics. Breakfast, lunch, and transportation to and from Annapolis will be provided.

If you will participate, please email legal@out4justice.org.



Save the Date


2026 United For Justice Advocacy Day

March 26, 10:00AM

Join us in Annapolis as we march to the State Capitol, rally on Lawyer's Mall, visit and dialogue with legislators to urge support for legislative proposals that ensure **JUSTICE FOR ALL** impacted individuals.

Transportation can be provided upon an email request.

For more information contact:
legal@out4justice.org or
programs@out4justice.org

 **OUT FOR JUSTICE**

Have an upcoming event you want us to highlight in the April newsletter?

Email gail@advancemaryland.org.

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