

**Youth Service Bureaus**

Department of Juvenile Services

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**Maryland**

**DEPARTMENT OF  
JUVENILE SERVICES**

## I. Introduction and Background

Pursuant to § 2–1257 of the State Government Article, the Maryland Department of Juvenile Services (DJS) is required to submit an annual report to the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee and the House Judiciary Committee on or before October 1, 2025 and each October 1st thereafter. This report provides an overview of DJS efforts to promote predelinquent programs, including Youth Service Bureaus (YSBs); its collaboration with and technical assistance to local governments regarding the establishment, use, and funding of YSBs; an assessment of the programs and activities conducted by YSBs; and other initiatives undertaken by the DJS to prevent youth offenses.

### *History and Purpose of Youth Service Bureaus in Maryland*

YSBs are community-based entities authorized under Maryland law to:

1. Provide delinquency prevention, youth suicide prevention, substance use prevention, and youth development programming;
2. Address and ameliorate the conditions that contribute to delinquency, youth suicide, family disruption, and related risks; and
3. Advocate for the needs of youth within their communities.

YSBs were first established in Maryland in the 1970s, following the passage of the 1974 Runaway and Homeless Youth Act, a federal statute that created a stream of dedicated funding for community-based services aimed at preventing youth homelessness, delinquency, and family disruption. Maryland leveraged these funds to seed YSBs across the state. At its height, Maryland supported 22 bureaus across 10 jurisdictions.

Over time, as federal appropriations under the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act and related delinquency-prevention programs were reduced, the financial foundation for YSBs in Maryland weakened. Federal dollars were gradually replaced by limited state and local support. By the mid-2000s, many bureaus had closed, consolidated, or restructured into other locally driven prevention programs.

Today, only four YSBs remain, located in three counties (Baltimore City, Carroll County, and Prince George’s County). These YSBs have survived mainly because of strong local government commitments, braided funding, and longstanding community partnerships.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://maysb.org/ysbureaus/>

## *Current Funding, Licensing, and Monitoring Structure*

As outlined above, historically, YSBs relied heavily on federal categorical grants. As those funds declined, Maryland shifted toward a locally driven funding model. Today, the remaining YSBs are supported primarily by county general funds, municipal contributions, and private foundation dollars. DJS provides policy guidance and technical assistance, but does not administer a dedicated statewide funding stream for YSBs. Federal delinquency prevention funds now flow through competitive block grants or discretionary projects, with no direct earmarks for YSBs. The result is an uneven landscape: a handful of jurisdictions maintain basic programming, while most lack any YSB presence.. However, even in jurisdictions that have not chosen to fund YSBs, many have invested in other locally designed initiatives aimed at preventing juvenile delinquency.

DJS's primary statutory (MD. CODE ANN., HUM. SERVS. 9-233) responsibility is to certify and monitor YSBs under COMAR. (MD. CODE REGS. 16.17.01) DJS conducts annual reviews to ensure each YSB operates in compliance with state standards, delivers services consistent with its mission, and aligns programming with community needs.

As part of the certification process, DJS evaluates program operations, staffing, and service delivery against established benchmarks for quality and effectiveness. YSBs must provide five core services<sup>2</sup>:

- Formal counseling;
- Information and referral;
- Crisis intervention;
- Substance abuse assessment and referral; and
- Informal counseling.

Ongoing monitoring is also required to track performance, provide technical assistance as needed, and address areas that may require improvement. Through this process, DJS not only fulfills its statutory obligations but also promotes accountability, strengthens the capacity of YSBs, and supports positive outcomes for the youth and families they serve. DJS examines program data related to the number of youth and families served, rates of successful program completion, and measurable progress in reducing recidivism, truancy, and other delinquent or high-risk behaviors. DJS ensures that YSBs maintain qualified staff, complete mandatory training, and adhere to all background clearance requirements. Documentation and reporting requirements are reviewed annually to confirm that programs maintain accurate and timely records in alignment with DJS policies. The quality of direct services provided is assessed through

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<sup>2</sup> COMAR 16.17.01.03(B)

case file reviews and monitoring visits. DJS staff evaluate whether interventions are consistent with individualized service plans, whether evidence-based practices are being implemented, and whether youth and families are receiving timely, appropriate, and coordinated services.

Fiscal and administrative oversight is also conducted as part of the monitoring process. DJS reviews financial management practices to verify that funds are used appropriately, resources are allocated to direct services, and the YSB demonstrates both accountability and sustainability. Effectiveness is measured not only by outcomes and compliance but also by the YSB's ability to implement feedback, respond to challenges, and demonstrate sustained improvements in service delivery.

## **II. Efforts by DJS to Promote Predelinquent Programs, Including YSBs**

DJS continues to emphasize predelinquent interventions designed to provide youth with early support and alternatives to system involvement. DJS prioritizes predelinquent interventions that provide youth with meaningful support before they enter the justice system. These efforts are rooted in prevention, early identification of needs, and coordinated community-based responses designed to reduce risk factors and strengthen protective supports for youth and families.

A key component of this work includes serving Children in Need of Supervision (CINS) youth who exhibit behavior such as chronic truancy, running away, or unmanageable behavior in the home, but who have not committed a delinquent act. DJS intake offices evaluate CINS complaints to determine the child's needs and refer them to appropriate community-based services rather than court involvement whenever possible. Through partnerships with YSBs, LMB-funded programs, and other local providers, DJS connects CINS youth and their families with supports such as family counseling, behavioral health interventions, mentoring, case management, and crisis response services. This approach aims to stabilize family situations, address underlying needs, and prevent future involvement with the juvenile justice system.

DJS also collaborates with Local Management Boards (LMBs), schools, law enforcement, and nonprofit organizations to promote Youth Service Bureaus (YSBs) as community hubs for prevention and early intervention. YSBs provide accessible services including counseling, conflict resolution, mentoring, restorative practices, crisis intervention, and behavioral health supports. These programs support both CINS youth and other young people showing early warning signs of possible system involvement, such as chronic absenteeism, family conflict, or minor first-time offenses.

DJS maintains a statewide, standardized approach to reviewing all CINS, community referrals, and intake complaints to identify youth who may benefit from predelinquent

services rather than formal court processing. Intake officers assess needs, connect youth and families with appropriate supports, and make referrals to community-based resources, including YSBs and LMB-funded programs. This proactive model ensures interventions are timely, targeted, and culturally responsive.

DJS has representation on every Local Management Board in the state. Through this role, DJS participates in reviewing family needs, identifying service gaps, and coordinating resources. LMBs focus on improving outcomes for children and families in priority areas such as reducing the impact of parental incarceration, supporting disconnected and opportunity youth, reducing youth homelessness and childhood hunger, expanding access to community-based services, and preventing unnecessary out-of-home or out-of-state placements. By serving on LMBs, DJS helps shape local prevention strategies, promotes data sharing, and ensures that both CINS youth and at-risk youth are connected to services before circumstances escalate.

### **III. Efforts by DJS to Collaborate with Local Governments on YSBs**

Several jurisdictions have expressed renewed interest in establishing or revitalizing YSBs. In response, DJS has fielded inquiries from counties exploring feasibility, funding sources, and program models. Staff have provided technical assistance on program design, governance structures, and funding strategies, including how to braid local, state, and philanthropic funds. DJS continues to partner with local leaders to view YSBs as part of a continuum of youth prevention services, complementary to Local Management Boards and other state and county-funded initiatives.

While the DJS does not have dedicated funding for new bureaus, it supports local governments in leveraging state prevention funds and in pursuing federal or foundation grants.

At the state level, the Children's Cabinet Interagency Fund (CCIF), managed by the Governor's Office for Children (GOC) in partnership with the Children's Cabinet, serves as the primary funding mechanism for interagency services. Local Management Boards (LMBs), which are the eligible recipients of CCIF funds under Human Services Title 8, access these dollars through Community Partnership Agreements that set budgets, performance measures, and accountability requirements. LMBs also oversee Local Care Teams (LCTs), which coordinate individualized service plans with participation from DJS and other core agencies, ensuring that services reflect local needs.

Recognizing that it has not always fully tapped into the breadth of community-based resources available, DJS has recently taken steps to strengthen its collaboration with local partners. In 2024, the DJS established the position of Assistant Secretary of

Resources to enhance the continuum of services for justice-involved youth and improve public safety. With support from a federally funded grant, DJS initiated regional meetings with juvenile justice stakeholders across the State to gather perspectives on existing frameworks, identify service gaps, and consider innovative approaches to prevention. These efforts reflect a new commitment by DJS to act as a stronger partner to local governments and providers, ensuring that youth are more effectively connected with services that meet their individual needs. A statewide scan of community prevention services, scheduled for completion in early 2026, will provide a comprehensive picture of available resources and will guide future efforts to align youth and families with effective, locally driven supports.

#### **IV. Assessment of YSB Programs and Activities**

Current YSBs in Maryland provide a mix of prevention and intervention services, including:

- Individual and family counseling to address early signs of delinquency or family conflict;
- Mentoring and life skills programs to build protective factors;
- School-based programming on substance use prevention, conflict resolution, and suicide prevention;
- Community outreach and advocacy, ensuring youth voices are heard in local decision-making;
- Referral and linkage services, connecting youth to mental health, workforce development, and educational support.

Evaluations indicate that YSBs play a unique role as trusted, community-based entities with strong ties to schools, families, and local organizations. However, the limited resources and number of YSBs restrict their reach and create geographic inequities in access to services. YSBs serve a very limited number of youth with active involvement in DJS. For example, in the latest Carroll County Youth Service Bureau Eligibility Report, CCYSB served 231 youth, and 5, or 2%, had DJS involvement.

#### **V. Other Efforts to Prevent Youth Offenses**

The Maryland General Assembly enacted significant changes to the juvenile code during the 2022 and 2024 legislative sessions. In 2022, the General Assembly raised the minimum age of juvenile court jurisdiction to 13, except in cases where a child between the ages of 10 and 12 is charged with a crime of violence. In 2024, jurisdiction was further expanded to include additional offenses, such as handgun violations. As a result of these statutory changes, the DJS can no longer be viewed primarily as the

direct service provider for prevention and early intervention. Instead, DJS now serves as a convener, regulator, and partner within the prevention ecosystem, working closely with local entities, including YSBs, schools, LMBs, and nonprofit providers. These reforms have expanded the population of children who are no longer under the juvenile justice system's jurisdiction and created a stronger mandate for coordinated, multi-agency responses to intervene when youth are showing signs of delinquent behavior.

Under this new framework, DJS is no longer positioned as the central service provider for prevention and early intervention. Instead:

- **Broader Interagency Role**

Prevention responsibilities are now distributed across Local Management Boards (LMBs), Local Care Teams (LCTs), schools, behavioral health agencies, and nonprofit providers, all funded or supported through mechanisms such as the Children's Cabinet Interagency Fund (CCIF). DJS plays a part, but is only one actor in a statewide prevention network.

- **Shift in Authority from Service Delivery to Oversight**

DJS retains responsibility for certification of Youth Service Bureaus , but it no longer directs or funds the majority of prevention services. Instead, its role is to ensure quality, consistency, and accountability through monitoring, data collection, technical assistance, and cross-agency planning.

- **Reliance on Local Infrastructure**

Because the law assumes that prevention is best delivered at the community level, success depends heavily on the capacity of local jurisdictions and nonprofits. DJS must therefore act as a convener and partner, bringing together agencies and providers to align resources and ensure that families do not fall through gaps in service.

In short, the 2024 reforms moved Maryland away from a model where DJS was expected to directly deliver prevention services, toward a systems-management model in which DJS functions as a regulator, partner, and data steward within a broader prevention ecosystem. This shift reflects an intentional policy choice: to localize service delivery, broaden interagency accountability, and embed prevention more firmly in communities rather than in state custody.

As the universe of youth coming under juvenile jurisdiction widens, the burden of delivering upstream diversion and supportive services will shift to community providers, schools, LMBs, and nonprofits. DJS's role must evolve to monitoring, quality assurance, technical assistance, and data-driven allocation rather than direct delivery. However, that shift presumes a uniformly capacitated local infrastructure; where capacity is weak or uneven, the risk of service deserts or inequitable prevention access grows. In addition to supporting Youth Service Bureaus, DJS invests in a portfolio of prevention and early intervention strategies designed to reduce youth involvement in crime. Some of the key initiatives include:

- **Arnold Ventures \$20M Youth Funding**  
Arnold Ventures announced a new \$20 million commitment for youth-focused initiatives. Of that, \$5.6 million is earmarked for scaling Big Brothers Big Sisters mentoring programs—an evidence-based intervention designed to strengthen protective relationships and reduce the risk of justice involvement.
- **THRIVE Expansion**  
DJS has continued to expand THRIVE, a program offering intensive mentoring, case management, and skill-building for youth at high risk of gun violence or who are facing automatic adult charges. THRIVE is intended to provide wraparound supports before or during system involvement, to reduce escalation.
- **School–Justice Partnerships, Truancy Reduction & Community Mediation**  
DJS supports local efforts to integrate justice and education systems, aiming to reduce the school-to-justice pipeline. This includes funding truancy reduction programs, facilitating mediation in community settings (to resolve conflicts without formal adjudication), and backing school–justice collaborations that intervene early.

These efforts reflect a shift from DJS simply being a responder to delinquency toward being one actor in a broader prevention ecosystem. They also underscore the importance of collaboration, leveraging external funding, and supporting non-punitive, community-based pathways for at-risk youth.

## **V. Conclusion**

DJS remains committed to building a service continuum that provides youth services that supports behavior change and connect youth to opportunities to get what they need. Youth Service Bureaus once represented Maryland's most visible statewide prevention infrastructure for youth. While diminished in number, the surviving bureaus continue to deliver vital services in their communities. With renewed local and state

attention—and potential legislative action—Maryland could integrate the YSB model into local structures to ensure more equitable access to prevention and youth development programming across the state.