

**Juvenile Justice Reform and Emerging  
and Best Practices Commission 2025  
Report**

*State Government Article, Section 9-3502(h)*

Governor's Office of Crime Prevention and Policy

October 3, 2025



WES MOORE  
Governor

ARUNA MILLER  
Lieutenant Governor

DOROTHY LENNIG  
Executive Director

October 3, 2025

The Honorable Wes Moore  
Governor of Maryland  
100 State Circle  
Annapolis, MD 21401

The Honorable William C. "Bill" Ferguson IV  
President of the Senate  
State House, H-107  
Annapolis, MD 21401-1991

The Honorable Adrienne Jones  
Speaker of the House of Delegates  
State House, H-101  
Annapolis, MD 21401

**RE: State Government Article § 9-3502(h) (MSAR #15348)**

Dear Governor Moore, President Ferguson, and Speaker Jones:

As required by § 9-3502(h) of the State Government Article, please find an enclosed copy of the Governor's Office of Crime Prevention and Policy's report, titled *Juvenile Justice Reform and Emerging and Best Practices Commission 2025 Report*. The report highlights the Commission's efforts to map service gaps, evaluate existing programs, elevate community voices, analyze system processes, and review child fatalities to identify systemic failings. It also provides a comprehensive overview of the work carried out by its five active workgroups - Public Education and Narrative Change, Fatality Review, Prevention, Youth Rehabilitative Services, and Processes and System Coordination - and the necessary steps to improve Maryland's juvenile justice system through upstream prevention, effective rehabilitation, improved interagency coordination, and community-informed solutions.

Should you have any questions relating to the information provided in this report, please feel free to contact me at 410-697-9338.

As required, five color copies will be sent to the DLS Legislative Library.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Dorothy J. Lennig".

Dorothy J. Lennig, Esq.  
Executive Director

**cc: Sarah Albert, Department of Legislative Services (5 copies)**

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## Acknowledgements

The Maryland Commission on Juvenile Justice Reform and Emerging and Best Practices (Commission) extends its sincere gratitude to the designees from the Department of Human Services (DHS) and the Department of Juvenile Services (DJS) for their ongoing partnership and contributions to this work. Many presenters also informed the Commission's annual report who represented a range of expertise and perspectives. These included national research organizations that provided data and analysis on best practices and system trends; academic experts who discussed evidence-based programs and quality improvement strategies; and frontline practitioners including public defenders, law enforcement leaders, and DJS officials, who shared insights on system processes, compliance challenges, and community-based interventions. Additionally, community advocates, child-serving organizations, and the children and families who shared their lived experiences contributed real-world perspectives on prevention and engagement strategies. These presenters offered critical knowledge that shaped the Commission's findings and recommendations, ensuring they are grounded in research, operational realities, and community experience.

It is a pleasure to welcome several new members of the Commission this summer. The Commission recognizes the following new members for their commitment to serve the State: Betsy Tolentino, Acting Secretary at DJS; April Adams, who joins as a parent member of the Commission and serves as a Family Support Peer Specialist at Maryland Coalition for Families; Bethany Lauren Strong, who joins as a victim advocate and whose current position is Acute Care Surgery Attending and Medical Director for CAP-VIP at the University of Maryland Capital Region Health; Eunice Yarahi Humphrey, who takes the principal seat on the Commission, and hails from the International High School at Langley Park; and Maria Virginia Navarro, Superintendent at Charles County Public Schools.

By contributing their diverse knowledge and experience, incoming Commissioners will guide the development of recommendations that further the Commission's mission of reforming juvenile justice and identifying best practices. Their work will lay the foundation for meaningful and lasting improvements that will touch the lives of Marylanders well into the future.

It is with immense gratitude that the Commission wishes a fond farewell to Vincent Schiraldi, Rhondalyne Reed, Terry Diggs, Reuben Alvarez, and Lacey Davis. During their tenure, they expertly modeled collaboration and commitment to this shared vision. On behalf of all Marylanders, thank you for moving the vision of the Commission forward. Throughout their tenure, they demonstrated strong collaboration and steadfast dedication to the Commission's mission of advancing juvenile justice reform and identifying best practices. On behalf of all Marylanders, we thank them for helping to carry this vision forward.

## Commission Members

The 28-member Commission is composed of two ex officio members from DHS and DJS, two senators appointed by the President of the Senate, two delegates appointed by the Speaker of the House, and 22 members appointed by the Governor. There are two vacancies: school principal and local school superintendent.

**Andre M. Davis** (Chair)

Former Judge, United States Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit

**Reuben Alvarez**

Youth Member

**Donald L. Baker, Jr.**

Sheriff, Caroline County

**Nate Balis**

Director, Juvenile Justice Strategy Group, Annie E. Casey Foundation

**Sandy Bartlett**

Delegate, District 32, Anne Arundel County

**Sean Aaron Betsinger**

Research Assistant Professor, The Institute for Innovation and Implementation at UMD School of Social Work

**Alycia Capozello**

Deputy District Public Defender, Baltimore City Public Defender

**Nick Charles**

Senator, District 25, Prince George's County

**Donna L. Christy**

President, Prince George's County Educator's Association

**Arntice Crowder-Nickerson**

Community Detention Officer, Department of Juvenile Services

**Lacey Davis**

Victim Witness Specialist, Juvenile Justice Unit, Anne Arundel County State's Attorney's Office

**Terry Diggs**

Youth Member

**Aubrey Edwards-Luce**

Executive Director, Center for Families Children Courts

**Eric N. Ford**

Executive Director, The Shriver Center at UMBC

**Russell Hammill**

Chief, Laurel Police Department

**Denise Henderson**

Youth Transportation Officer, Department of Juvenile Services; President, AFSCME Local 3167

**Susan Leviton**

Professor Emeritus of Law, University of Maryland School of Law

**Rafael Lopez**

Secretary, Department of Human Services

**Liz Park**

Director, Greenbelt CARES

**N. Scott Phillips**

Delegate, District 10, Baltimore County

**Rhondalyne Reed**

Parent Member

**Vinny Schiraldi**

Secretary, Department of Juvenile Services

**Tanya Schwartz**

Director, Urgent and Acute Care, Behavioral Health Administration, Maryland Department of Health

**Will Smith**

Senator, District 20, Montgomery County

**Lara Weathersbee**

Associate Judge, Howard County Circuit  
Court, 5th Judicial Circuit

**Carlotta Woodward**

Chief, Juvenile Court Division, Montgomery  
County State's Attorney's Office

# **Message from The Honorable Andre M. Davis, Commission Chair**

When we first gathered as a Commission, I shared a deep sense of responsibility and opportunity. I called our mandate a “heavy lift,” not lightly, but with clear-eyed recognition of the scope of what lay before us: 22 distinct charges outlined in statute, and one more that I believe is foundational - keeping children out of the justice system to begin with. Today, after a year of hard work, learning, and collaboration, I remain as inspired as I was that day, and even more confident in the power and purpose of this Commission.

From the outset, I have seen our charge not merely as one of bureaucratic review, but as an urgent moral call. The well-being of Maryland’s children, particularly those who have been historically marginalized or disproportionately affected by systemic inequities, must remain at the center of our vision. The Speaker and Senate President were right to take pride in this legislation. Few bills are crafted with such scope, ambition, and moral clarity. This Commission has the potential to alter the trajectory of juvenile justice policy in our State for generations. That is no small thing.

This report not only captures the progress made in the Commission’s first months but also reflects the foundational work required to establish an enduring structure for reform. Following its formal convening in November 2024, the Commission focused on developing governance processes, standing up five specialized workgroups, and aligning members around a shared vision for a developmentally appropriate, equitable juvenile justice system. These early months were dedicated to building an infrastructure capable of producing meaningful, actionable change, including workgroup charters, planning frameworks, and engagement with stakeholders statewide. Looking ahead, the Commission is poised to transition from exploration to action.

Over the coming year, it will release major deliverables, including a brief from the Processes and System Coordination Workgroup addressing Maryland’s noncompliance with federal law, comprehensive recommendations from the Prevention Workgroup on upstream strategies to keep youth out of the system, and a public education campaign designed to reshape narratives about safety and accountability. These next steps will move the Commission toward its ultimate goal: a coherent, evidence-based policy framework that advances both community well-being and public safety.

As we continue forward, we must never lose sight of the foundational truth I shared in those opening remarks: justice-involved children need what all children need, only more of it, more

consistently, and with more compassion. They need healing, not handcuffing. Support, not surveillance. Opportunity, not obstacles. And they need us to lead with both urgency and care.

The Commission has laid a strong foundation. The road ahead is long, but I am certain that with the commitment each Commissioner has shown, we will meet the moment. Our work will not only fulfill a legislative mandate, it will reflect our promise to do right by Maryland's children.

# Executive Summary

In accordance with § 9-3502(h) of the State Government Article, the Commission must submit a report to the Governor and the General Assembly by October 1, 2025, and each October 1 thereafter, as it relates to its findings.

Pursuant to its charge, this *Juvenile Justice Reform and Emerging and Best Practices Commission 2025 Report* reflects Maryland’s commitment to building a developmentally appropriate, community-based, and equity-focused juvenile justice system. Chaired by Judge Andre M. Davis, the Commission brings together legislators, system leaders, advocates, and community members to ensure Maryland’s juvenile justice system reflects the latest research, aligns with national best practices, and responds to the needs of young people. For more information regarding the Commission’s activities, please visit the Governor’s Office of Crime Prevention and Policy’s (Office’s) website at: <https://gocpp.maryland.gov/councils-commissions-and-workgroups/juvenile-justice-reform-and-emerging-and-best-practices/>.

## Background

As required by § 9-3502 of the State Government Article, which was established by Chapter 735 of 2024 (House Bill 814), the Commission is charged with evaluating programs and services for children that are delivered by State, local, and community-based agencies; examining emerging and effective practices; monitoring key juvenile justice system services, processes, and outcomes; and developing recommendations to strengthen programs and services for children.<sup>1</sup> Pursuant to its charge, the Commission must:

- Report and review on:
  - All juvenile services, facilities, and programs in the State;
  - The educational programs and services of the Department of Juvenile Services;
  - Programs designed to divert children from the juvenile justice system;
  - The treatment and programming needs of females in the juvenile justice system;
  - The use of Child in Need of Supervision petitions;
  - The number of Child in Need of Supervision petitions authorized or denied by jurisdiction; and
  - The wait times for placement of children in facilities;
- Research culturally competent, evidence-based, research-based, and promising programs and practices relating to:

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<sup>1</sup> The table on [Appendix A](#) reflects how the Commission, through its workgroups, is collectively addressing all responsibilities outlined in its statutory mandate.

- Child welfare;
- Juvenile rehabilitation;
- Mental health services for children; and
- Prevention and intervention services for juveniles;
- Evaluate the cost-effectiveness of existing and promising programs and practices researched by the Commission;
- Identify means of evaluating the effectiveness of programs and practices researched by the Commission;
- Giving special attention to organizations located in or serving historically underserved communities, identify strategies to enable community-based organizations that provide services for juveniles to evaluate and validate services and programming provided by those organizations;
- Review data relating to arrests, completion of programming, and recidivism from the Maryland Longitudinal Data System Center;
- Identify opportunities for greater coordination between the Department of Juvenile Services, the Office of the State's Attorney, law enforcement, and local organizations that provide services to juveniles;
- Recommend policies and programs to improve juvenile services in the State;
- Participate in interpreting for the public the objectives of the juvenile services in the State;
- Participate in planning the development and use of available resources to meet the needs of juveniles;
- Coordinate with the Maryland Department of Labor to identify potential job and apprenticeship opportunities for juveniles under the supervision of the Department of Juvenile Services; and
- Examine and review fatalities involving children under the supervision of the Department of Juvenile Services for the purpose of providing recommendations on policies and programs to prevent fatalities, including:
  - A death caused by a child under the supervision of the Department of Juvenile Services, if the child is convicted or adjudicated delinquent for the death; and
  - The death of a child under the supervision of the Department of Juvenile Services.

## **Commission Activities**

Since its inception, the Commission has focused on building a strong foundation for long-term impact through thoughtful structure, member engagement, and an intentional approach to reform. From its first meeting, the Commission was launched with clarity around the weight of its charge to examine Maryland's juvenile justice system and offer evidence-based, data-informed recommendations that center children, community safety, equity, and effectiveness. Judge Davis,

as chair, framed the work as both urgent and collaborative, emphasizing the diversity of experience and expertise on the Commission and the necessity of an ambitious, high-performing body capable of delivering meaningful reform.

Following the launch, the Commission quickly turned its attention to the development and organization of workgroups. Early meetings were dedicated to aligning members with areas of focus based on expertise and interest. While the initial configuration included treatment and reentry as separate groups, feedback from members prompted a restructuring that combined them into a unified Youth Rehabilitation Services Workgroup. Additionally, the Commission added a Prevention Workgroup to reflect a shared priority of addressing the needs of children before justice system involvement. By the second meeting, five workgroups were confirmed: Public Education and Narrative Change, Fatality Review, Prevention, Youth Rehabilitation Services, and Juvenile Justice Processes and System Coordination. Each workgroup was assigned co-chairs, had charters clarified, and began monthly meetings with support from the Governor's Office of Crime Prevention and Policy (GOCPP) staff. A commitment to cross-collaboration among workgroups was also established, recognizing that issues like diversion, public understanding, and system alignment cut across silos.

Throughout the Commission's first several meetings, member and stakeholder engagement has been a central priority. Commissioners include legislators, law enforcement, system professionals, and community advocates, and each meeting reinforces the expectation that their perspectives and leadership are essential to shaping the work. Early Commission sessions featured substantive presentations to ground members in the current state of Maryland's system and to elevate national best practices. This included a deep dive into adolescent brain development and juvenile sentencing implications from the Center for Law, Brain and Behavior, and a two-part presentation from the Vera Institute, reflecting on Maryland's previous Juvenile Justice Reform Council and sharing insights from national work to end girls' incarceration. These presentations provided foundational knowledge while also reminding the Commission of what had been achieved, and what remained undone.

As part of its commitment to elevating practitioner insight and frontline perspectives, the Commission has hosted two panels to inform its deliberations. In May 2025, the Commission convened a panel titled "*From First Contact to Community Connection: Law Enforcement, Youth, and the Power of Early Intervention.*" Moderated by Judge Davis, the session featured Chief Lisa Reynolds (Baltimore Police Department), Captain Elizabeth Smith and Carol Parreco (Anne Arundel County Police Department), and Detective Sergeant Amber Hafer (Caroline County Sheriff's Office). Panelists discussed early law enforcement encounters with children, diversion opportunities, system coordination challenges, and community-based strategies to support prevention and intervention.

In June 2025, the Commission held a second panel, *“Defending Our Future: The Role of Maryland Public Defenders in Juvenile Justice.”* This session highlighted the crucial role of public defenders in advancing equity, advocating for alternatives to detention, and supporting children and families throughout the legal process. Panelists included Tiera Hawkes, Michelle Kim, and Kimberlee Watts, all attorneys with the Maryland Office of the Public Defender. Their reflections shed light on systemic gaps, racial disparities, trauma-informed practice, and the critical need for interagency collaboration to better serve children.

Public engagement has also been a central thread, especially through the Public Education and Narrative Change Workgroup, which has initiated conversations about legislative education, public misunderstanding, and message discipline. Commissioners have expressed strong interest in ensuring the voices of children and system-impacted perspectives are present and that the Commission’s public-facing work be clear, accessible, and grounded in data.

Overall, the Commission’s early phase has focused on standing up a structure capable of thoughtful, inclusive, and effective reform work. Through organized workgroups, stakeholder alignment, substantive panels, and consistent member engagement, the Commission is moving toward its charge with purpose, transparency, and shared commitment.

Furthermore, and under the leadership of Chair Andre M. Davis, as well as workgroup chairs and co-chairs, members convened to advance long-term systemic reform, based on the following:

- The Public Education and Narrative Change Workgroup focused on the critical role of accurate and accessible information in shaping public understanding of juvenile justice. Their priorities include correcting misinformation, engaging the media, and centering children and family voices to build trust and support for reforms.
- The Fatality Review Workgroup, which will hold its first review in October 2025, underscored the importance of systemic analysis of child fatalities to identify missed opportunities for early intervention and improved oversight. Equity and cross-system coordination were identified as central to preventing future tragedies and ensuring that lessons learned translate into meaningful reforms.
- The Prevention Workgroup emphasized that meeting basic needs such as housing, food security, and safety is fundamental to preventing system involvement. Persistent service gaps, particularly in rural and under-resourced communities, along with funding instability and limited cross-sector coordination, remain key challenges that require sustained attention.
- The Youth Rehabilitation Services Workgroup identified inequities in access to treatment, workforce shortages, and gaps in continuity of care as major barriers to rehabilitation. Members also stressed the need for culturally responsive programming and the expansion of evidence-based interventions to ensure quality and consistency across the State.

- The Processes and System Coordination Workgroup highlighted Maryland’s noncompliance with federal law as a critical issue, driven by automatic charging statutes and the resulting detention of children in adult facilities. Policy misalignment, data fragmentation, and procedural inconsistencies were cited as additional barriers to efficiency, accountability, and equity in system operations.

Across all workgroups, common themes emerged, including the urgent need for early and equitable access to services, stronger cross-sector collaboration, and culturally responsive, trauma-informed practices (*as described in greater detail in the [Workgroup Activities](#) section*). Workforce limitations, funding instability, and fragmented data systems were recurring challenges that cut across prevention, rehabilitation, and system processes. These shared priorities reinforce the Commission’s commitment to a coordinated, equity-driven approach to reform that addresses both immediate needs and long-term structural change.

Over the next year, each workgroup will deepen its analysis, engage with a broader set of stakeholders, and begin drafting concrete legislative and administrative recommendations.

## **Workgroup Activities**

The Commission’s work is to ensure Maryland’s juvenile justice system is developmentally appropriate, equitable, and aligned with national best practices. Its charge goes beyond addressing practices within DJS to examine the full landscape of youth interaction with the justice system, from upstream prevention and early interventions to system processes, rehabilitation, and public understanding. The aim is to identify and dismantle structural barriers that perpetuate harm, improve coordination across agencies, and elevate strategies that keep children connected to their families and communities while enhancing public safety.

The Commission’s five workgroups reflect this comprehensive approach. Each focuses on a critical stage or function within the continuum of youth engagement. The Prevention Workgroup examines root causes and unmet basic needs that lead to system involvement. The Processes and System Coordination Workgroup addresses statutory and operational inefficiencies, including automatic charging, detention practices, and cross-agency data sharing. The Fatality Review Workgroup investigates the most serious failures to identify lessons that can prevent future harm. The Youth Rehabilitation Services Workgroup reviews diversion, treatment, and reentry support to ensure continuity of care and equity in access. Finally, the Public Education and Narrative Change Workgroup works to reshape public understanding and discourse so that policy and practice reflect evidence rather than fear or misinformation.

Together, these workgroups create a holistic framework for reform. By looking both upstream and across systems, the Commission seeks not only to bring Maryland into compliance with

federal law but to advance structural change that promotes safety, fairness, and opportunity for every child.

## Public Education and Narrative Change Workgroup Summary

### **Workgroup Co-Chairs and Members**

The Public Education and Narrative Change Workgroup is co-chaired by Eric Ford, Executive Director of the Shriver Center at UMBC, and Nate Balis, Director of Juvenile Justice Strategy at Annie E. Casey Foundation. Members of the Workgroup include: Aubrey Edwards-Luce, Executive Director of the UBalt Law Sayra and Neil Meyerhoff Center for Families, Children and the Courts; Rhondalyne Reed, parent member; Alycia Capozello, Deputy District Public Defender for Baltimore City Office of the Public Defender; Lacey Davis, Victim Witness Specialist at the Juvenile Justice Unit for Anne Arundel County State's Attorney's Office; Terry Diggs, youth member; Susan Leviton, Professor Emeritus of Law at the University of Maryland School of Law; Sean Aaron Betsinger, Research Assistant Professor at The Institute for Innovation and Implementation at UMD School of Social Work; and Marc Schindler, DJS Designee.

### **Objectives and Approach**

The Workgroup is charged with improving public understanding of juvenile justice in Maryland to help increase community safety, address the challenges of the juvenile justice system, and shift harmful or inaccurate narratives that drive fear-based or punitive responses. Members believe that education must be tailored to clarify how the juvenile system operates, and address persistent misinformation while offering a developmentally informed, racially equitable counter-narrative. The Workgroup collaborates with the Commission's other workgroups - Prevention, Fatality Review, Processes and System Coordination, and Youth Rehabilitation Services - to share recommendations and findings widely to impact perceptions and root cause solutions, and the future of juvenile justice in the State.

To develop its guiding principles, the Workgroup intentionally prioritized the inclusion of children and families directly impacted by the juvenile justice system. Commission members with direct connections to community-based organizations elevated the perspectives of children through existing relationships and outreach, as well as insights from listening sessions and interviews with young people and parents who had experienced the system firsthand, ensuring the principles were grounded in authenticity and accountability. The Workgroup then synthesized these voices into a set of values centered on dignity, truth-telling, structural context, and the importance of shifting power. By embedding children and family voices into the foundation of

their framework, the Workgroup committed not just to speaking about impacted communities, but to amplifying their narratives and leadership throughout the Commission's work.

Rather than relying on abstract policy briefs or internal documents, the Workgroup is committed to public-facing materials that meet communities where they are, spark dialogue, and empower people with actionable knowledge.

### **Meetings and Activities to Date**

The Workgroup met regularly between January and April 2025, and held a planning session on April 28 with the new GO CPP Commission Director. Early sessions included review of narrative surveys to the Commissioners, which helped identify persistent myths, language patterns, and framing choices that shape how Marylanders view juvenile justice. Members analyzed recent media coverage, noting that public opinion is often distorted by high-profile incidents and sensationalized reporting, while the true data on delinquent acts, service access, and system functioning remains inaccessible to most residents.

During the April 28 planning session, the Workgroup reached consensus on a major deliverable: a dynamic, Maryland-specific infographic project that visually maps the juvenile justice process from first contact through reentry. This product will highlight discretionary decisions that occur before DJS involvement, such as those made by school resource officers and law enforcement, and how those decisions vary across jurisdictions. The Workgroup intends to include narrative excerpts and testimonials from young people, caregivers, and practitioners, making the system more legible and relatable. The infographic will draw inspiration from successful public education tools, such as a comic book–style explainer developed in New York City, and incorporate design elements suitable for social media distribution, classroom use, and legislative education.

Members also discussed using the DJS Data Resource Guide's system flowchart as a baseline and overlaying it with community narratives and key decision points. While in the early project planning phase, the Workgroup is actively developing a content capture timeline and identifying best practices from other jurisdictions. The co-chairs expressed continued interest in partnering with the Vera Institute of Justice to support narrative strategy and creative content development. The Workgroup also began exploring the development of a series of narrative themes tied to other Commission work streams, including prevention, processes, and rehabilitation, and how public education can help contextualize these areas for audiences ranging from children and families to media, legislators, and educators.

### **Emerging Themes and Considerations**

Key themes have emerged across Workgroup conversations. First, public misunderstanding about the juvenile system is widespread, and it is compounded by contradictory narratives. For

example, rising detention rates are often cited as evidence of increased delinquency, while simultaneously, DJS is accused of “not doing enough;” a contradiction that obscures system realities and undermines reform. Second, accountability is often framed as synonymous with punishment, rather than support and growth. The Workgroup discussed the importance of reframing safety not merely as surveillance or restriction, but as access to opportunity, healing, and care. Finally, members are concerned that children are frequently portrayed as threats rather than as full people; often victims of delinquent acts and denied the public’s belief in their worthiness for employment, education, restoration, or rehabilitation. The Workgroup sees its narrative work as central to restoring that belief.

### **Outputs and Work Products**

In its first phase, the Workgroup developed an outline for its infographic and storytelling project, with draft categories for inclusion such as points of discretionary decision-making, jurisdictional variation, and reentry pathways. Members contributed example content, including survey findings and policy documents, and began identifying interview candidates and visual design partners. In parallel, the Workgroup began drafting a set of narrative principles that will guide public-facing language and messaging for Commission publications. These principles aim to challenge punitive assumptions and reflect an equity-oriented understanding of safety and accountability. The infographic is intended as a flexible tool that can serve a range of audiences and uses. Social media graphics, fact sheets, and community-facing explainers are planned to complement the infographic.

Another proposed output is the development of proactive media education briefings designed to deepen reporters’ understanding of the juvenile justice system in Maryland. Modeled after standard public relations tactics, these briefings would convene subject matter experts from the Commission to engage directly with journalists in an informal setting where they can ask in-depth questions. The goal is to move media coverage away from a reactive, incident-driven narrative and toward more informed, accurate reporting that reflects the complexities of the system and the broader context of reform efforts. By equipping reporters with reliable information, historical context, and credible sources before a crisis occurs, the Commission can help shape more balanced and nuanced public discourse. This approach has the potential to reach wider audiences than static materials like infographics, fostering a deeper public understanding through stories that better capture both the challenges and progress in juvenile justice reform.

### **Next Steps**

In the months ahead, the Workgroup will continue refining the infographic concept and begin gathering content from young people, families, and practitioners across the State. Members will coordinate with the Prevention and Processes workgroups to ensure aligned messaging and explore shared communication tools. The Workgroup also plans to vet the flowchart design and

narrative framing with key community stakeholders and may partner with local media or advocacy organizations to support broader dissemination. A key priority will be ensuring that final products are both accessible and resonant - clear enough for new audiences, yet grounded in the complexity and humanity of real experiences of children. The Workgroup is also exploring additional formats, including zines, animations, and live teach-ins, to expand reach and foster dialogue across Maryland communities.

## Fatality Review Workgroup Summary

### **Workgroup Co-Chairs and Members**

The Fatality Review Workgroup is co-chaired by Lara Weathersbee, Associate Judge for Howard County Circuit Court's 5th Judicial Circuit, and Carlotta Woodward, Chief of the Juvenile Court Division at Montgomery County State's Attorney's Office. Members of the Workgroup include: Donald L. Baker, Jr., Sheriff of Caroline County; N. Scott Phillips, Delegate for District 10; Denise Henderson, Youth Transportation Officer at DJS and President of AFSCME Local 3167; Nick Charles, Senator for District 25; and Lisa Garry, DJS Designee.

### **Objectives and Approach**

The Workgroup was created in accordance with the Commission's statutory charge under § 9-3502 of the State Government Article, to examine child fatalities under the supervision of DJS and to develop recommendations for prevention through policy and system improvements. The Workgroup is not tasked with reinvestigating individual cases or assigning blame, but rather with identifying systemic gaps and recurring themes in child deaths. The purpose is to generate insight, not fault, and to elevate recommendations rooted in care, equity, and cross-system learning. The Workgroup will review fatalities of children who die while under DJS supervision, as well as cases where children under DJS supervision are adjudicated or convicted in relation to a death.

### **Meetings and Activities to Date**

Although the Workgroup held its first official meeting in June 2025, preliminary coordination and check-ins occurred between GOCPP staff and DJS during the spring to shape the Workgroup's infrastructure. At the June meeting, the Workgroup discussed core expectations and confirmed the group's purpose, scope, and confidentiality procedures. Judge Weathersbee, Carlotta Woodward, and Kara Aanenson provided important framing: the Workgroup's work will focus on learning from cases to identify systemic intervention points, rather than determining culpability. Participants reviewed the updated statutory charge, which differs from the prior State Advisory Board's role, in that this body reports directly to the Governor.

DJS described its role in providing case materials, historical context, and presenting each fatality case. Case presentations will be handled by the region's DJS staff with support from higher-level DJS managers. All records will be shared securely through a password-protected system, and removed following the meeting. Workgroup participants will be required to sign a confidentiality agreement before each fatality review meeting, in recognition of the highly sensitive nature of the cases, including the educational, medical, mental health, and juvenile justice records of children.

### **Confidentiality and Open Meetings**

While Workgroup meetings are subject to the Open Meetings Act in general, fatality reviews will be held in closed session pursuant to statutory exceptions. Applicable confidentiality provisions include §§ 3-305 and 3-402 of the General Provisions Article and § 3-8A-27 of the Courts and Judicial Proceedings Article. These statutes protect juvenile information and allow for confidential case discussions in accordance with legal requirements. Confidentiality agreements will prohibit printing, saving, or distributing case documents. A review protocol is in development to ensure all participants uphold these standards.

### **Next Steps**

The Workgroup will begin its case reviews in October 2025, with quarterly meetings thereafter in January, April, July, and October 2026. DJS is preparing case files dating back to January 2025, and a maximum of four cases per meeting will be reviewed, with adjustments based on complexity. GOCPP and DJS will finalize a secure document-sharing system and prepare for the Workgroup's first substantive reviews. The Workgroup will continue to uphold transparency with the Commission while maintaining strict confidentiality protocols for all case reviews.

### **Reflections and Considerations**

The Workgroup represents a solemn but necessary evolution in Maryland's juvenile justice system. Its members recognize the weight of their charge: to examine the most tragic outcomes of system involvement and search for meaning, accountability, and prevention. The Workgroup is deeply committed to a process that is respectful, rigorous, and repair-oriented. While the content is often heavy, the hope is clear that through this work, Maryland can build a system better equipped to recognize early warnings, respond with care, and prevent future harm. The first reviews scheduled for late 2025 will mark a significant milestone, and the Commission will be guided by the Workgroup's findings in shaping its broader vision for reform.

## Prevention Workgroup Summary

### **Workgroup Co-Chairs and Members**

The Prevention Workgroup is co-chaired by Aubrey Edwards-Luce, Executive Director for the Center for Families Children Courts, and Donna L. Christy, President of Prince George's County Educator's Association. Members of the Workgroup include: Arntice Crowder-Nickerson, Community Detention Officer for DJS; Eric N. Ford, Executive Director at The Shriver Center at UMBC; Rafael Lopez, Secretary of DHS; Russell Hammill, Chief of the Laurel Police Department; Rhondalyne Reed, parent member; Sandy Bartlett, Delegate for District 32; Nick Charles, Senator for District 25; Maisha Davis, DJS Designee; Munazza Abraham, DJS Designee; and Reuben Alvarez, youth member.

### **Objectives and Approach**

The Workgroup was formed to identify, evaluate, and elevate upstream strategies that prevent children from becoming involved in the juvenile legal system. The Workgroup is tasked with identifying the root causes of system contact and surfacing both gaps in service provision and promising practices that offer alternatives to punitive pathways. Members have adopted a dual-framework approach: Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs serves as a developmental scaffold, emphasizing the foundational importance of food, safety, belonging, and esteem; meanwhile, an ecological model helps the Workgroup examine how these needs, and the systems designed to meet them, function across multiple domains, including individual, family, school, community, and broader policy levels. The Workgroup aims to advance a statewide prevention model that identifies early risk factors and responds with relational, equitable, and community-centered supports before legal involvement ever occurs.

### **Meetings and Activities to Date**

The Workgroup convened four times during the Commission's first year on February 10, March 10, April 14, June 9, and July 14, 2025. At its January meeting, the Workgroup oriented around Maslow's Hierarchy as a useful tool for organizing its thinking and agreed to ground its work in racial equity, community knowledge, and system transformation. Members discussed how juvenile system contact often stems from unmet basic needs such as housing, food, or safety, and agreed that prevention must start with ensuring that children's core physiological and emotional needs are met.

At the March meeting, members continued refining the Workgroup's prevention framework, with an emphasis on building shared language and structure for identifying unmet needs. The Workgroup discussed how many children and families are already eligible for services long before any legal involvement occurs, but often fall through the cracks due to fragmented systems

and inaccessible resources. Members explored strategies to surface those gaps and began developing a Prevention Matrix, which is a tool to organize risks, supports, and intervention opportunities across individual, relational, and community domains. An example from Prince George's County's truancy efforts was referenced to illustrate interagency collaboration, and the Workgroup went on to conceptualize how statewide infrastructure could better align around early, holistic supports that keep children out of the system altogether.

At the April meeting, members received a presentation from the Maryland Department of Health's Center for Tobacco Prevention and Control, focused on the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS). The presentation offered valuable insight into data trends on youth mental health, violence, substance use, and protective factors like positive childhood experiences. The Workgroup explored how this data might inform prevention strategies, particularly around mental health supports and school climate. Members asked questions about survey methods, data reliability, and how the information could be used to target services or track disparities. The meeting also included a recap of the Workgroup's overarching goals: mapping services to Maslow's Hierarchy, analyzing both individual- and systems-level interventions, and understanding where current policies and investments fail to reach young people before court involvement. Members expressed interest in exploring additional data sources and engaging youth and family voices directly through future sessions or forums.

At the May planning meeting, the co-chairs and new GOCPP Commission Director strategized about future sessions, member engagement, and thematic focus areas. The Workgroup reaffirmed its framework and agreed to organize future meetings around each tier of Maslow's Hierarchy, beginning with physiological needs such as hunger. Members discussed the structural invisibility of many needs of children like food insecurity or medical neglect, and how the prevention conversation must include overlooked areas like prenatal care, caregiver support, and early childhood social-emotional development. The Workgroup agreed that future sessions would include guest speakers, data reviews, and case examples relevant to each layer of the hierarchy.

### **Presentations and Resources Reviewed**

To date, the Workgroup has reviewed a variety of frameworks and examples, including Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, ecological systems theory, YRBS, the Prince George's County Truancy Workgroup model, and internal drafts of a Prevention Matrix. The Workgroup is preparing to bring in additional expertise, including presentations on food insecurity and early childhood mental health. Members expressed particular interest in inviting infant and early childhood systems experts such as Lisa Shanty, and reviewing State and local data related to hunger, school attendance, and behavioral health service access for young children and families.

## **Emerging Themes and Preliminary Findings**

Several themes have consistently emerged across the Workgroup's discussions. First, Maryland has a wide array of services and programs, but families often lack clear and coordinated access points, which leads to preventable crises and system involvement. Second, prevention must begin long before school age and address the invisible needs of children and caregivers, such as housing instability, food insecurity, and unmet medical needs. Third, the current system design often waits until harm has occurred before activating services. Members emphasized that this must change. True prevention is proactive, relational, and embedded in everyday systems of care and connection, not something triggered only by justice system contact. Finally, the Workgroup views its role not just as identifying gaps, but as building a new logic model for child well-being, and one that centers equity, care, and access from the start.

## **Outputs and Work Products**

The Workgroup has begun to document current programs, assess regional variation in access, and identify priority areas for investment. This will help structure the Workgroup's recommendations and may serve as the foundation for a broader Commission framework on upstream interventions. In parallel, the Workgroup has planned a series of topic-based sessions, beginning with hunger and food insecurity. It is developing strategies to activate all members more fully in future meetings through shared assignments, roundtable discussions, and collaboration.

## **Next Steps**

In the coming months, the Workgroup will host a session focused on food insecurity and hunger, including presentations on childhood nutrition and school-based feeding programs. Future sessions will address other tiers of Maslow's framework, including physical and emotional safety, family belonging, and community support. The Workgroup will continue refining its strategy map and matrix, seek partnerships with State agencies and nonprofit collaborators, and develop draft recommendations for the Commission's consideration. The co-chairs are also designing a structure to better engage members through small group tasks and targeted resource development.

## **Reflections and Considerations**

The Workgroup's members share a core belief: that the best justice reform happens before a child ever enters the system. They view prevention as the moral and strategic center of juvenile justice reform, and one that requires state investment, public engagement, and the reimagining of how society meets the needs of children and families. As they often say, "our job is to make the other workgroups unnecessary." By working upstream and across food, housing, healthcare, education,

and belonging, the Workgroup is building a vision of a Maryland where children are supported early, consistently, and with care.

## Youth Rehabilitation Services Workgroup Summary

### **Workgroup Co-Chairs and Members**

The Youth Rehabilitation Services Workgroup is co-chaired by Sean Aaron Betsinger, Research Assistant Professor at The Institute for Innovation and Implementation at UMD School of Social Work, and Liz Park, Director at Greenbelt CARES. Members of the Workgroup include: Carlotta Woodward, Chief of the Juvenile Court Division at Montgomery County State's Attorney's Office; Terry Diggs, youth member; Munazza Abraham, DJS Designee; Tanya Schwartz, Director of Urgent and Acute Care for the Behavioral Health Administration at the Maryland Department of Health; Sandy Bartlett, Delegate for District 32; Arntice Crowder-Nickerson, Community Detention Officer at DJS; Maisha Davis, DJS Designee; Russell Hammill, Chief of the Laurel Police Department; Rafael Lopez, Secretary of DHS; Meghan Galloway, DHS Designee; and Will Smith, Senator for District 20.

### **Objectives and Approach**

The Workgroup was established to evaluate and strengthen the continuum of rehabilitative services available to children involved in Maryland's juvenile justice system. Its charge includes examining diversion, community supervision, treatment while in placement, and reentry support, with the goal of identifying effective strategies and gaps in service delivery. The Workgroup's approach has been rooted in inquiry, collaboration, and integration of cross-disciplinary expertise. Members have reviewed presentations from State officials, researchers, and service providers; explored evidence-based and emerging practices; and coordinated efforts with other Commission workgroups to ensure alignment.

The Workgroup intentionally defined its scope as focused on secondary and tertiary prevention -interventions that occur after initial system contact, such as diversion from court processing, alternatives to detention, placement-based treatment, and post-disposition support. This distinction from the Commission's Prevention Workgroup, which focuses on primary prevention and upstream interventions, has allowed the Youth Rehabilitation Services Workgroup to concentrate its efforts on the service landscape for children already navigating the justice system. A key feature of the Workgroup's strategy will be its collaboration with DJS to contribute to a statewide scan of community-based rehabilitative services, designed to assess availability, quality, and equity across Maryland's regions.

## **Meetings and Activities to Date**

The Workgroup met four times between January and April 2025, with meetings held virtually on a bi-monthly schedule. At its first meeting on January 24, the Workgroup received an extensive overview from DJS Deputy Secretaries Lisa Garry and Adina Levi on a series of programs designed to support children who are post-disposition or placed outside the home. These included the Thrive Academy and Thrive Passport programs, which offer enhanced supervision through credible messengers for children at highest risk of involvement in gun violence or struggling on probation. Other programs discussed included Access, supporting children returned from the adult criminal system, and Embrace, designed for younger adolescents. Commissioners also learned about the role of “pending placement” units in detention facilities, which enable children to begin treatment services while awaiting a residential bed. The meeting underscored the importance of continuity in behavioral health services and the damaging impact of placing children in adult facilities, especially for long periods without access to age-appropriate treatment or education.

At the second meeting on February 28, members introduced themselves in depth and clarified the Workgroup’s goals. Assistant Secretary Maisha Davis provided additional context on DJS’s vision for a robust, regionally responsive continuum of care and explained how the federal Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) is supporting the agency’s efforts through a planning grant. The Workgroup affirmed its role in shaping the direction of the statewide service scan, particularly by identifying questions, indicators, and potential data sources to ensure that the needs of children, families, and communities are reflected.

The March 28 meeting focused on Maryland’s Youth Service Bureaus (YSBs), with a presentation from Dr. Liz Park. YSBs, which are currently present in three jurisdictions yet originated in 10 jurisdictions, serve as vital community-based providers offering a range of services such as family counseling, mentoring, education support, and mental health interventions. They are in Code of Maryland Regulations (COMAR) under DJS as diversion services and work with children and their families to prevent further contact with juvenile services, and at times provide reintegration support for children reentering their communities post-placement. The Workgroup discussed opportunities to expand awareness and utilization of YSBs, particularly in jurisdictions that may not currently have them or are under-leveraging their potential. Several members raised the possibility of integrating this discussion into the broader statewide scan and developing a survey to identify known and unknown programs throughout Maryland.

At the April 25 meeting, the University of Maryland’s Institute for Innovation and Implementation shared its approach to continuous quality improvement (CQI) and service evaluation. Presenters demonstrated how the Institute collects, analyzes, and shares data on

evidence-based program implementation and access, helping providers and agencies improve fidelity and outcomes. They shared dashboards and maps that highlighted regional disparities in service access. Members reflected on how this infrastructure could support a more coordinated, transparent, and equitable system of care and discussed the value of institutionalizing technical assistance and monitoring.

### **Presentations and Resources Reviewed**

Throughout its meetings, the Workgroup reviewed presentations from key State leaders and research experts, including officials from DJS, the Maryland Association of Youth Service Bureaus, and the University of Maryland. These presentations covered a range of topics from enhanced supervision, pending placement practices, and treatment services in DJS facilities, to data-informed program evaluation and infrastructure to support CQI. Members reviewed documentation on Thrive Academy and Passport, Access and Embrace pilot programs, CQI dashboards, Youth Service Bureau models, and outcome data supported by the Annie E. Casey Foundation and federal funding. These resources helped contextualize programmatic successes while also identifying persistent gaps, particularly across rural and underserved areas.

### **Emerging Themes and Preliminary Findings**

Several key themes emerged from the Workgroup's discussions. First, the use of credible messengers to support children in high-risk settings shows early promise, but must be coupled with structural support, professional development, and long-term sustainability planning. Second, children placed in adult jails often lose valuable time and access to services, with research and stakeholder experience suggesting that these placements increase risk of harm and recidivism. Third, behavioral health services must be consistent across facility and community contexts, with a strong emphasis on warm handoffs and continuity of care post-release. Fourth, the lack of transportation, especially in rural areas like the Eastern Shore and Western Maryland, presents a serious barrier to accessing rehabilitative services. Lastly, members underscored the need for better regional mapping of service providers, eligibility criteria, and access points.

### **Outputs and Work Products**

While still in its early phases, the Workgroup has already contributed significantly to the shaping of DJS's community services scan. It has identified priority regions for inquiry, proposed a framework for identifying service gaps, and begun curating a list of additional experts and local leaders to inform its work. The Workgroup has also provided feedback on evaluation design and helped ensure that the voices of local providers and advocates will be reflected in future deliverables.

## **Next Steps**

In the coming months, the Workgroup will receive a formal presentation from DJS's Continuum Coordinator on the initial findings of the service scan. It plans to host additional presenters from local credible messenger networks, YSBs, and Local Management Boards. The Workgroup will continue to examine regional service disparities and make recommendations for program expansion and investment. It also aims to explore how to support the professionalization of the credible messenger workforce, including training, certification pathways, and long-term career development.

## **Reflections and Considerations**

The Workgroup's early discussions have reinforced that successful rehabilitation is rooted in relationships, consistency, and access. Maryland's efforts to build a more robust rehabilitative continuum must account for the structural realities of children and families, such as geography, transportation, racial disparities, and funding gaps, while elevating models that work, such as Thrive and credible messenger partnerships. Creating a juvenile justice system that truly centers rehabilitation will require not only program development, but a cultural shift in how agencies collaborate with communities, recognize lived experience, and share power.

## **Processes and System Coordination Workgroup Summary**

### **Workgroup Co-Chairs and Members**

The Processes and System Coordination Workgroup is co-chaired by Alycia Capozello, Deputy District Public Defender for Baltimore City Office of the Public Defender, and Susan Leviton, Professor Emeritus of Law at the University of Maryland School of Law. Members of the Workgroup include: Denise Henderson, Youth Transportation Officer for DJS and President of AFSCME Local 3167; Lacey Davis, Victim Witness Specialist for the Juvenile Justice Unit at the Anne Arundel County State's Attorney's Office; Liz Park, Director at Greenbelt CARES; Nate Balis, Director of Juvenile Justice Strategy Group at Annie E. Casey Foundation; Donald L. Baker, Jr., Sheriff of Caroline County; Reuben Alvarez, youth member; Will Smith, Senator for District 20; Rafael Lopez, Secretary of DHS; Jenny Egan, DJS Designee; Vinny Schiraldi, Secretary of DJS; and Lara Weathersbee, Associate Judge for Howard County Circuit Court's 5th Judicial Circuit.

### **Objectives and Approach**

The Workgroup was established to examine the full trajectory of how children interact with Maryland's legal system, from first contact through case resolution. Its primary focus includes analyzing the mechanics of automatic charging, the timing and discretion involved in judicial

waivers, delays in transfer hearings, and the points at which system gaps increase the risk of children being unnecessarily detained in adult facilities. The Workgroup is also critically assessing Maryland's compliance with JJDP, with particular focus on the "Sight and Sound Separation" and "Jail Removal" mandates. Using a "life-of-a-case" framework, members are mapping juvenile system touchpoints to understand how structural inefficiencies and policy decisions impact both individual outcomes and systemwide equity.

### **Meetings and Activities to Date**

The Workgroup met formally in February, March, April, and May 2025. For the February 21 meeting, members reviewed data from GOCPP's dashboards on children charged as adults and received a national perspective from The Sentencing Project. Maryland's outsized use of automatic charging was a central concern, especially given that a vast majority of those children ultimately return to the juvenile system after months of adult detention. This prompted the Workgroup to investigate not just the front-end decision-making, but also the long procedural timelines that exacerbate harm.

By March 21, the Workgroup had pivoted toward data needs and accountability. Members supported a formal GOCPP request to the Maryland Judiciary for disaggregated, case-level data on transfer and case processing. At that meeting, the Workgroup also examined several case examples in which children experienced prolonged detention due to procedural and administrative breakdowns, highlighting the urgent need for better cross-system coordination and real-time data sharing.

At the April 11 meeting, the Workgroup met with Jenny Egan with DJS, who tracks the transfer process for young people. This meeting marked a turning point as the Workgroup began to more deeply explore Maryland's federal noncompliance and its potential consequences. Members learned that new federal thresholds, adopted in 2024, revealed Maryland to be the worst-performing state in the nation in terms of "Jail Removal" violations. Children charged as adults who are often held in adult facilities far beyond the federal six-hour limit are the primary source of these violations. The Workgroup began developing a multi-pronged strategy to understand the barriers to timely transfer, judicial discretion, and juvenile placement capacity.

On May 9, the co-chairs convened a follow-up compliance planning meeting with Jenny Krabill, who handles JJDP compliance at GOCPP. During this session, Krabill detailed the federal funding consequences of Maryland's violations, noting that the State will lose 20% of its formula grant and must now redirect 50% of its remaining funds toward compliance efforts. Members learned that in fiscal 2023, Maryland reported 1,268 violations, translating to a compliance rate more than six times worse than the federal maximum threshold. In fiscal 2024, that number was projected to exceed 1,600. These violations stem primarily from children held in adult jails without timely "Interest of Justice" (IOJ) orders, with site-specific problems such as lack of

sight-and-sound separation, inconsistent IOJ issuance, and inadequate detention capacity across both juvenile and adult facilities.

The Workgroup explored how systemic barriers, such as the limited authority of bail commissioners, variability in judicial practice, and DJS's restricted intake capacity, compound delays and lead to preventable harm. Members also reflected on how Maryland's legislative failure to reform automatic charging laws has deepened the crisis. Despite multiple attempts since 2021 to pass corrective legislation, no bill has succeeded. The Workgroup emphasized that the State's inability to comply with federal law is not just a funding issue but a moral and human rights concern.

### **Presentations and Resources Reviewed**

Across its meetings, the Workgroup reviewed a wide range of materials and expert input. This included GOCPP's statewide dashboards and policy recommendations related to transfer of children, conviction, and sentencing, as well as testimony and analysis from The Sentencing Project on national trends in automatic charging and decarceration. The Workgroup also examined internal DJS documents, such as case tracking dashboards and narrative timelines, alongside compliance monitoring data detailing Maryland's violations under JJDPA. Additional background on federal thresholds, IOJ requirements, and judicial discretion limitations was provided by Jenny Egan and the GOCPP Compliance Office.

### **Emerging Themes and Preliminary Findings**

A core realization for the Workgroup this year has been how the current system prioritizes short-term decision-making - moving children back and forth between adult and juvenile facilities - at the expense of long-term efficiency, legality, and child outcomes. The practice of automatically charging children as adults, only to later return the majority of these cases to the juvenile system, creates a high-stakes bottleneck that is costly, slow, and harmful. Members noted that it is often faster and more resource-efficient to start young people in juvenile facilities, where developmental needs are better met, rather than cycle them through adult jails that are neither designed for rehabilitation nor equipped to comply with federal mandates.

This insight has led the Workgroup to elevate automatic charging practices and federal noncompliance as two of the most urgent systemic issues under its purview. The frequent failure to meet requirements for "Jail Removal" and "Sight and Sound Separation" has underscored how administrative inefficiencies and outdated legal defaults continue to drive preventable harm. Children may spend weeks or months in adult jails, which are spaces not intended for their safety or development, due to procedural delays, staffing shortages, and lack of judicial authority at early hearing stages.

Recognizing that jurisdictional variation and case complexity obscure the scale of this problem, the Workgroup supported a formal data request to the Maryland Judiciary for disaggregated, case-level data. This information will help quantify how many children experience delayed transfer, how long they are held, and what case outcomes ultimately result. Preliminary reviews suggest that the status quo does not serve children, does not reduce delinquency, and increasingly places Maryland in violation of federal law. These findings have shaped the Workgroup's current focus and will directly inform its forthcoming recommendations.

### **Outputs and Work Products**

In its first year, the Workgroup supported a formal data request to the Judiciary seeking charge-level and disposition-level data on juveniles charged, convicted, and sentenced as adults, including demographic details, offense and sentencing information, and indicators of system transfer, to enable accurate accounting of case outcomes for children across both court systems. Members are finalizing a brief on Maryland's federal noncompliance, to be circulated to the full Commission. The document outlines key issues, compliance benchmarks, and immediate steps needed to bring Maryland closer to federal standards. In parallel, the Workgroup is engaging with the Judiciary, DJS, GOCPP, and county-level partners to identify interventions and shared solutions.

### **Next Steps**

Looking ahead, the Workgroup will continue working with GOCPP and the Judiciary to support the development of a statewide IOJ response framework and identify judiciary liaisons who can support compliance reform. It will contribute to identifying system needs and recommending supports that strengthen front-end decision-making, including exploring how to ensure judges have timely, reliable information to make IOJ determinations within the federal six-hour window; increasing access to case context at initial detention points; advising adult facilities on appropriate intake and documentation procedures; expanding strategic engagement with the Judiciary as a systems partner; and coordinating with district court leadership to explore feasible paths to more consistent practices. In parallel, the Workgroup will continue drafting compliance-related recommendations and may propose policy changes, including possible revisions to Maryland's automatic charging statute during the 2026 Maryland General Assembly session.

### **Reflections and Considerations**

The Workgroup has surfaced one of the most urgent and complex challenges facing Maryland's juvenile justice system: its ongoing failure to comply with federal law in how it handles children charged as adults. What began as a technical compliance issue has revealed a web of structural, legal, and operational dysfunctions that disproportionately harm Black and Brown children and

compromise the State’s credibility and moral authority. The Workgroup is committed to developing solutions that are systemic, not symbolic, and that uphold the fundamental rights, dignity, and developmental needs of Maryland’s children.

## **Cross-Cutting Themes**

Over the Commission’s first year, each workgroup brought its own focus and lens to the Commission’s statutory mandate, whether rooted in prevention, narrative change, rehabilitation, fatality review, or system coordination. Yet, a clear set of shared themes emerged that reflected the interconnected nature of Maryland’s juvenile justice landscape.

### **The Need for Early and Equitable Access to Services**

Across every workgroup, a consistent priority has been ensuring that young people and their families have access to services before crises escalate into legal involvement. The Prevention Workgroup has been explicit in framing unmet basic needs such as housing, food security, and healthcare as key drivers of system contact, advocating for early, community-based supports that operate outside punitive frameworks. Similarly, the Youth Rehabilitation Services Workgroup has underscored the urgency of timely access to behavioral health care, diversion programs, and credible messenger interventions once a child enters the system. Both groups have identified transportation barriers, workforce shortages, and regional disparities as structural challenges that perpetuate inequity, particularly in rural areas and among families of color.

The Processes and System Coordination Workgroup has approached this issue from a systemic perspective, calling attention to how administrative delays and inconsistent judicial practices postpone critical services, sometimes for months, while children remain in adult facilities without treatment or education. The Fatality Review Workgroup, although focused on the most severe outcomes, has also pointed to patterns of unmet needs that preceded system involvement and, if addressed earlier, might have prevented harm. Finally, the Public Education and Narrative Change Workgroup is tackling the cultural dimension of access by reframing narratives that equate accountability with punishment and promoting public understanding of rehabilitative services as essential to safety and success. Together, these efforts reflect a shared belief: equitable and timely access to support is not a peripheral goal but the foundation of a just and effective juvenile justice system.

### **Centering Voices of Children and Families**

Centering the voices of children and families has been a unifying principle across the Commission’s workgroups, shaping both their processes and priorities. The Public Education and Narrative Change Workgroup placed this value at the heart of its strategy by incorporating listening sessions and interviews with children and caregivers directly impacted by the system

into its planned communications campaign. These perspectives informed narrative principles grounded in dignity, truth-telling, and structural context. Similarly, the Prevention Workgroup emphasized family experience in mapping unmet needs and designing early intervention strategies. Members have acknowledged that parents and caregivers often know when challenges begin, yet systemic barriers prevent timely support. By elevating these insights, the group aims to build prevention models that are responsive to real-life conditions, not just theoretical frameworks.

Other workgroups have integrated children and family perspectives through targeted engagement and attention to lived experience. The Youth Rehabilitation Services Workgroup included a youth member and examined programs, such as credible messenger initiatives, that rely on peer and community leadership as a cornerstone of success. The Fatality Review Workgroup, though dealing with sensitive cases, has committed to approaching its work with empathy and respect for the families impacted, ensuring its recommendations address the human consequences of system failures. Likewise, the Processes and System Coordination Workgroup has grounded its compliance discussions in the understanding that procedural delays are not abstract—they represent prolonged periods where children and families face uncertainty and harm. Taken together, these efforts reflect a clear consensus: authentic reform requires that children and families are not only heard but actively shape the solutions.

### **Local Variation and Equity Gaps**

All five workgroups have consistently identified local variation as a driver of inequity across Maryland's juvenile justice system. The Prevention Workgroup highlighted that access to upstream supports like school-based interventions, mental health resources, and family assistance programs differs widely by jurisdiction. These gaps often mean that in some counties, early intervention opportunities exist, while in others, families face barriers that lead to deeper system involvement. The Youth Rehabilitation Services Workgroup echoed this concern by documenting regional disparities in the availability of community-based programs, noting that rural areas, in particular, struggle with transportation challenges and workforce shortages that limit access to critical rehabilitative services. These disparities exacerbate existing racial and socioeconomic inequities, leaving the most vulnerable children with the fewest options for diversion or treatment.

The Processes and System Coordination Workgroup examined how current laws and resource constraints contribute to inconsistent application of laws and policies, particularly in the context of automatic transfer and detention decisions. This variation not only impacts compliance with federal standards but also deepens inequities for children of color, who are disproportionately charged as adults and held in adult facilities. Although the Fatality Review Workgroup has not begun reviewing individual cases, its mandate positions it to uncover how local variation in

policy, resources, and coordination contributes to the most serious outcomes in Maryland’s juvenile justice system. By examining systemic factors that preceded child fatalities, the group expects to identify patterns such as gaps in behavioral health access, differences in case management practices, and regional disparities in crisis response. The Public Education and Narrative Change Workgroup recognized these inequities as part of its narrative strategy, emphasizing the need to explain to the public why where a young person lives should not determine the quality or timeliness of their care. Together, these insights underscore the Commission’s commitment to developing solutions that address structural inequities and ensure a consistent, fair response for every child across Maryland.

### **Cross-Sector Collaboration is Essential but Inconsistent**

The workgroups underscored that meaningful reform in Maryland’s juvenile justice system cannot occur in isolation. The Prevention Workgroup repeatedly highlighted that early interventions often fail not because services do not exist, but because systems do not work together to connect families to them. Members cited examples of fragmented communication between schools, child welfare, and behavioral health providers, leading to missed opportunities for support. The Youth Rehabilitation Services Workgroup echoed this concern when examining reentry planning, emphasizing that continuity of care requires strong handoffs between detention facilities, mental health systems, and community-based organizations. Without coordination, children often experience gaps that derail progress and increase recidivism risk.

The Processes and System Coordination Workgroup addressed collaboration as both a structural and compliance issue, noting that delays in transfer hearings and inconsistent IOJ determinations stem in part from siloed operations between courts, DJS, and local detention centers. Similarly, the Public Education and Narrative Change Workgroup recognized that changing public perception requires cross-sector alignment on messaging from educators, law enforcement, community leaders, and policymakers. Even the Fatality Review Workgroup, as it prepares for its first reviews, has committed to a multi-system lens that includes education, health, and social services in analyzing contributing factors to child deaths. Across these efforts, the Commission has reached a clear conclusion: cross-sector collaboration is not optional but essential, and while examples of strong partnerships exist, they remain inconsistent and uneven across the State.

### **Data Fragmentation and Access**

Through their research and presentations, data fragmentation emerged as a barrier to progress for juvenile justice reform, limiting both accountability and the ability to design responsive solutions. The Processes and System Coordination Workgroup addressed this most directly, highlighting the need to establish secure, rapid-response information channels between DJS, the Judiciary, law enforcement, and detention facilities to enable timely hearings and compliance with federal requirements. Similarly, the Youth Rehabilitation Services Workgroup emphasized

the lack of centralized information on available programs, eligibility criteria, and outcomes, noting that even within State agencies, data systems often do not communicate. These silos make it difficult to track children across placements, monitor continuity of care, and measure the effectiveness of rehabilitative services.

The Prevention and Public Education Workgroups also underscored the impact of incomplete or inaccessible data. Prevention members stressed that understanding risk factors requires integrated data from schools, child welfare, and health systems, yet these sectors operate under different protocols with limited information sharing. The Public Education Workgroup encountered similar obstacles when developing accurate public-facing materials, noting that community mistrust deepens when basic questions about system performance cannot be answered with clear data. Looking ahead, the Fatality Review Workgroup is expected to encounter similar challenges, as its ability to identify systemic patterns will depend on access to case records from multiple agencies. Across the Commission's work, the message is clear: without consistent, transparent, and integrated data systems, Maryland cannot achieve a juvenile justice system grounded in evidence, equity, and accountability.

### **Workforce Capacity and Cultural Responsiveness**

Workforce capacity emerged as a shared concern across workgroups, with members emphasizing that reform efforts cannot succeed without a well-trained, adequately resourced staff across systems. The Youth Rehabilitation Services Workgroup focused heavily on the need to professionalize and sustain the credible messenger workforce, recognizing these roles as vital for building trust and supporting children through reentry. Members also flagged shortages of behavioral health providers and transportation staff as major barriers to consistent service delivery, particularly in rural areas. Similarly, the Prevention Workgroup noted that teachers, school-based staff, and community providers often lack both the time and resources to address underlying needs of children, leading to missed opportunities for early intervention.

Cultural responsiveness was identified as equally critical. The Public Education and Narrative Change Workgroup stressed that messaging and engagement strategies must reflect the lived experiences of children and families, particularly those from Black and Brown communities who are disproportionately impacted by the system. The Processes and System Coordination Workgroup raised concerns about inconsistent training for judges and court personnel on adolescent development and racial equity, which contributes to uneven decision-making and procedural delays. The Fatality Review Workgroup, while not yet active, has committed to analyzing how cultural blind spots in service delivery may have contributed to system failures in the most serious cases. Across all workgroups, the consensus is clear: building a workforce that is both competent and culturally attuned is fundamental to creating an equitable and developmentally appropriate juvenile justice system.

## **Funding Limitations and Short-Term Cycles**

All workgroups identified funding as a structural constraint that limits both innovation and sustainability. The Prevention Workgroup emphasized that many upstream interventions, such as family support services, mental health care, and early education programs, depend on short-term grants that are not renewed consistently. This creates instability for providers and forces families to navigate a constantly shifting landscape of resources. Similarly, the Youth Rehabilitation Services Workgroup noted that programs showing strong outcomes, such as credible messenger initiatives and Youth Service Bureaus, struggle to maintain operations without reliable, long-term funding. Members warned that the absence of sustained investment perpetuates inequities, as smaller community-based organizations, often led by people of color, are the most vulnerable to funding gaps.

The Processes and System Coordination Workgroup linked funding challenges directly to compliance issues, observing that limited resources for staffing and detention alternatives contribute to prolonged case processing and the overuse of adult facilities. The Public Education and Narrative Change Workgroup raised a related concern: public education campaigns and narrative strategies often lack dedicated funding, which restricts the ability to counter misinformation or build community trust over time. While the Fatality Review Workgroup has not begun case reviews, its future recommendations will likely underscore the need for permanent funding streams to address systemic gaps that contribute to harm. Across all groups, the pattern is clear: Maryland's reliance on short-term funding cycles undermines long-term planning and reform, reinforcing the need for stable, predictable investment in programs that keep children safe and supported.

## **Legislative and Policy Misalignment**

The workgroups surfaced examples of legislative or policy misalignment that undermine Maryland's ability to create a coherent, developmentally appropriate children justice system. The Processes and System Coordination Workgroup addressed this most directly, noting that the State's automatic transfer statute conflicts with both best practice and federal compliance requirements under JJDP. These statutory provisions result in children being held in adult facilities for extended periods, creating legal risk and harming rehabilitation efforts. Similarly, the Youth Rehabilitation Services Workgroup pointed to gaps between policy intent and operational reality, where rules designed to support treatment continuity are often disrupted by rigid placement protocols and lack of clarity around agency responsibilities.

The Prevention and Public Education Workgroups highlighted how policies outside the juvenile system, such as school discipline rules and zero-tolerance practices, often contradict the State's broader commitment to diversion and equity. These inconsistencies drive unnecessary referrals to the justice system, particularly for Black and Brown children, despite evidence supporting

restorative approaches. While the Fatality Review Workgroup has not yet begun case reviews, it expects to examine how misaligned mandates across child-serving systems may contribute to the most serious outcomes. The Commission's workgroups have made clear that without greater alignment between law, policy, and practice, Maryland will continue to face fragmented responses that compromise both safety and fairness.

## **Next Steps and Future Work**

As the Commission enters its second year, the focus will shift from exploration to action. Each workgroup will move toward developing findings and translating them into concrete recommendations that address both the unique priorities of their charge and the shared challenges identified as cross-cutting themes. These next steps will not occur in isolation. Instead, they will align into a unified strategy to strengthen Maryland's juvenile justice system, ensuring that solutions are evidence-based, equity-driven, and operationally feasible.

### **Public Education and Narrative Change Workgroup**

The Public Education and Narrative Change Workgroup will move its narrative strategy from planning to implementation. In the coming year, the Workgroup will launch an infographic and public education campaign that makes the system's complexity visible and explains why upstream prevention and rehabilitation are essential to community safety. These efforts will combat misinformation, center stories of children and family, and equip stakeholders with clear, equity-oriented messaging. By reframing public understanding, this work addresses themes of accountability, cultural responsiveness, and systemic alignment, reinforcing the Commission's broader policy agenda.

### **Fatality Review Workgroup**

The Fatality Review Workgroup will begin its case reviews in late 2025, analyzing systemic gaps that contributed to the most severe outcomes of children under DJS supervision. Insights from these reviews will inform recommendations for earlier intervention, improved crisis response, and cross-system accountability. This work will reinforce the importance of data integration, cultural responsiveness, and proactive service delivery, ensuring that the lessons drawn from tragedy shape systemic reforms that prevent future harm.

### **Prevention Workgroup**

The Prevention Workgroup will continue building its statewide prevention model, prioritizing early and equitable access to services as the foundation of reform. In the next year, the Workgroup will focus specifically on the lowest tiers of Maslow's hierarchy: (1) physiological needs, including the fundamental requirements for survival such as air, water, food, shelter,

clothing, sleep, and reproduction; and (2) safety needs, which encompass security and stability in life, including personal protection from harm, health and well-being, financial security, and a safe living environment.<sup>2</sup> This approach recognizes that unmet needs such as food, housing stability, and physical safety often drive children into system involvement. It will begin work on its Prevention Matrix and Strategy Map, linking systemic barriers such as transportation and funding instability to practical solutions for improving access to nutrition, healthcare, safe housing, and protective environments for children and families. The Workgroup will also develop recommendations for sustainable investments in community-based resources, centering children and family voices in every phase. These efforts will directly address the themes of early access, cross-sector collaboration, and funding stability by proposing a coordinated prevention infrastructure that operates outside punitive pathways.

### **Youth Rehabilitation Services Workgroup**

The Youth Rehabilitation Services Workgroup will initiate its statewide scan of rehabilitative services and translate findings into strategies for reducing regional inequities and strengthening cultural responsiveness. Recommendations will emphasize professionalizing the credible messenger workforce, ensuring continuity of behavioral health services, and expanding diversionary programs to avoid unnecessary confinement. This work will tackle local variation, workforce capacity, and short-term funding cycles by proposing policy changes and resource allocations that prioritize consistent, developmentally appropriate care for children.

### **Processes and System Coordination Workgroup**

The Processes and System Coordination Workgroup will continue its examination of systemic inefficiencies, with a primary focus on addressing Maryland's compliance with JJDP. While it will explore operational improvements, the Workgroup's long-term recommendation will target statutory reform of automatic transfer laws, which are the root driver of federal violations and inequitable detention practices. Additional recommendations will include improvements in data-sharing, standardized IOJ procedures, and judiciary training to reduce harmful delays. These actions directly respond to themes of policy misalignment, data fragmentation, and cross-sector collaboration.

### **Integration Across the Commission**

These workgroup efforts will converge into a comprehensive reform agenda that reflects the interdependence of Maryland's juvenile justice challenges. While each group addresses distinct aspects of the continuum, their recommendations will be synthesized into a framework that centers equity, prioritizes children and family voice, and aligns law, policy, and practice. This integrated approach will enable the Commission to deliver on its legislative mandate while

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<sup>2</sup> McLeod, S. (2023). *Maslow's Hierarchy Of Needs*. <https://www.simplypsychology.org/maslow.html>

advancing a transformative vision: a system that protects public safety by promoting opportunity, healing, and fairness for every child in Maryland.

## Appendix A: Statutory Requirements

This table provides a visual summary of which Commission workgroups are addressing each statutory requirement under § 9-3502 of the State Government Article. While workgroups often address overlapping issues, each statutory requirement is aligned with the workgroup most directly responsible based on its charter. This chart reflects those primary assignments, illustrating how the Commission, through its workgroups, is collectively addressing all responsibilities outlined in its statutory mandate.

Statutory Requirements	Responsibility
1. Review and report on <b>all juvenile services, facilities, and programs in the state</b>	All
2. Review and report the <b>educational programs and services</b> of the Department of Juvenile Services	Processes and System Coordination
3. Review and report <b>programs designed to divert children</b> from the juvenile justice system	Prevention
4. Review and report the <b>treatment and programming needs of females</b> in the juvenile justice system	Processes and System Coordination
5. Review and report the <b>use of child in need of supervision petitions</b>	Prevention
6. Review and report <b>the number of child in need of supervision petitions authorized or denied</b> by jurisdiction	Prevention
7. Review and report the <b>wait times for placement</b> of children in facilities	Processes and System Coordination
8. Research culturally competent, evidence-based, research-based, and promising programs and practices relating to <b>child welfare</b>	Youth Rehabilitation Services; Prevention
9. Research culturally competent, evidence-based, research-based, and promising programs and practices relating to <b>juvenile rehabilitation</b>	Youth Rehabilitation Services
10. Research culturally competent, evidence-based, research-based, and promising programs and practices relating to <b>mental health services for children</b>	Youth Rehabilitation Services; Prevention
11. Research culturally competent, evidence-based, research-based, and promising programs and practices relating to <b>prevention and intervention services for juveniles</b>	Youth Rehabilitation Services; Prevention
12. Evaluate the <b>cost-effectiveness of existing and promising programs and practices</b> researched by the commission	Commission w/expert support

13. <b>Identify means of evaluating the effectiveness</b> of programs and practices researched by the Commission	Commission w/expert support
14. Giving special attention to organizations located in or serving historically underserved communities, <b>identify strategies to enable community–based organizations that provide services for juveniles to evaluate and validate services and programming</b> provided by those organizations	Commission w/expert support
15. Review data relating to arrests, completion of programming, and recidivism from the <b>Maryland Longitudinal Data System Center</b>	All
16. Identify opportunities for <b>greater coordination</b> between the Department of Juvenile Services, the Office of the State’s Attorney, law enforcement, and local organizations that provide services to juveniles	Processes and System Coordination, Prevention
17. Recommend <b>policies and programs to improve juvenile services</b> in the state	All
18. Participate in <b>interpreting for the public</b> the objectives of the juvenile services in the state	Public Education and Narrative Change
19. Participate in <b>planning the development and use of available resources</b> to meet the needs of juveniles	Processes and System Coordination, Prevention, Youth Rehabilitation Services
20. Coordinate with the <b>Maryland Department of Labor to identify potential job and apprenticeship opportunities</b> for juveniles under the supervision of the Department of Juvenile Services	Youth Rehabilitation Services
21. Examine and review <b>fatalities involving children under the supervision of the Department of Juvenile Services</b> for the purpose of providing recommendations on policies and programs to prevent fatalities, including a <b>death caused by a child under the supervision</b> of the Department of Juvenile Services, if the child is convicted or adjudicated delinquent for the death	Fatality Review
22. Examine and review fatalities involving children under the supervision of the Department of Juvenile Services for the purpose of providing recommendations on policies and programs to prevent fatalities, including the <b>death of a child under the supervision</b> of the Department of Juvenile Services	Fatality Review

## **Appendix B: Summary of Data Reviewed**

The Commission is required to report on and review data on the juvenile justice system. GOCPP, on behalf of the Commission, has made several data requests pursuant to this charge.

### **Department of Juvenile Services**

GOCPP entered into an MOU with DJS on May 9, 2025 to receive data on juveniles at different points in the juvenile justice system. This MOU includes information on complaints, offenses, adjudications, placements, supervision, and court outcomes requested by the Research, Analysis, and Evaluation Division, as well as educational services provided by the Juvenile Services Education Program. As of June 16, 2025, GOCPP has received data and is working to create an interactive dashboard.

### **Administrative Office of the Courts**

According to § 3–530 of the Public Safety Article, GOCPP is required to receive and analyze data on children charged as adults. GOCPP submitted an initial request to the Administrative Office of the Courts on June 27, 2024, and received aggregate data on December 30, 2024 and January 13, 2025. GOCPP collaborated with the Juvenile Justice Processes and System Coordination Workgroup to request more comprehensive data on May 5, 2025. GOCPP and the Administrative Office of the Courts have been in communication regarding the use of confidential data.

### **Maryland Longitudinal Data System Center**

The Maryland Longitudinal Data System Center (MLDSC) collects data from several State agencies to evaluate education and workforce outcomes. The Commission is required to specifically review data “relating to arrests, completion of programming, and recidivism” from MLDSC. In addition, GOCPP has requested information on dual systems-involved children. A Project Proposal was submitted to MLDSC on June 12, 2025, and will follow the Project Proposal timeline outlined by the MLDSC.