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DATE: March 3, 2021
Bill Number: SB0905 - Juvenile Services - Workgroup to Develop Evidence-Based, Research-Based, and Culturally Competent Practices
DJS Position: Support

The Department of Juvenile Services (DJS or department) supports SB0905.

SB0905 requires DJS and the Department of Human Services (DHS) to convene a workgroup including a Maryland public policy institute and other relevant stakeholders to complete a baseline assessment of the use of evidence-based, research-based, and culturally competent practices in areas of child welfare, juvenile rehabilitation, and juvenile mental health services.

SB0905 leverages existing DJS/DHS partnerships, including the Crossover Youth Practice Model (CYPM).

In 2015, DJS and partners began the CYPM, a program designed to coordinate casework of youth who are dually involved in both the juvenile justice and the child welfare systems. Throughout its implementation, the program has fostered increased communication and collaboration between DJS and local Department of Social Services (DSS) offices to provide youth with services that fit their individual needs, to avoid duplication of services, and to divert foster care youth when appropriate away from formal justice system involvement.

SB0905 mirrors DJS reform efforts focused on utilizing community-based treatment whenever possible.

Maryland has experienced a decline over several years of the number of young people that have been committed to a DJS out-of-home treatment program. The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in reductions in complaints and in the detention and committed populations. Maryland operates a continuum of treatment options ranging from community based foster care placements to facilities that provide treatment in a secure setting; SB0905 creates a program inventory for interventions available across child-serving agencies.

SB0905 supports community and interagency partnerships that identify valid and successful programming for youth.

DJS works with local law enforcement, courts, health departments, attorneys, and other stakeholders to keep youth safe and supported. Field staff make referrals to community-based providers to meet the treatment needs of youth under community supervision. Additionally, DJS uses research-supported, community-based family therapy programs to address the needs of youth, and to reduce further system involvement and out-of-home placements. Evidence-Based Services (EBS) include family-based therapeutic models shown to be effective with youth involved with the juvenile justice system.

SB0905 aligns with DJS-supported recommendations issued by the Juvenile Justice Reform Council (JJRC).

The JJRC, with the assistance of the Vera Institute of Justice, spent the last year researching best practices regarding the treatment of justice-involved youth and identifying recommendations to limit risk factors that contribute to contact with the justice system. One recommendation was to extend the JJRC to continue researching and evaluating opportunities to improve Maryland's juvenile justice system. The workgroup created by this bill matches the JJRC recommendation to inventory and expand evidence-based programming across agencies.

For these reasons, DJS urges a favorable report on SB0905.