



To: The Honorable William Smith  
From: Maryland Youth Justice Coalition  
Re: Senate Bill 905: Juvenile Services - Workgroup to Develop Evidence-Based, Research-Based, and Culturally Competent Practices  
Date: March 3, 2021  
Position: Support

Dear Chairman Smith and Honorable Members of the Committee.

The Maryland Youth Justice Coalition (MYJC) is a group of passionate advocates and policy experts dedicated to creating a more fair and equitable youth criminal legal system where not only are youth given opportunities and options, but public safety is uplifted. MYJC aims to improve the lives of all system-impacted youth through legislative and policy advocacy. MYJC is made up of organizations, including representation from directly impacted and youthful individuals, who share an equitable vision for the future of the youth criminal legal system. We are dedicated to supporting evidence-based, culturally competent, and gender-responsive solutions that are vetted by directly impacted individuals and promote positive youth development and public safety.

MYJC supports Senate Bill 905: Juvenile Services - Workgroup to Develop Evidence-Based, Research-Based, and Culturally Competent Practices (SB 905), which would create a workgroup that is charged with completing a baseline assessment and publishing an inventory of the existence and use of evidence-based, research-based, and culturally competent practices in child welfare, youth rehabilitation, and children's mental health services. Our members recognize the need for and clear benefit of implementing programs that define and measure success through meaningful outcomes that get at the root of both problems and solutions. Evidence-based justice practice includes integrating practitioner expertise with the best available external evidence from systematic research.

Maryland's youth services must be holistically capable of effective rehabilitation for youth, especially from diverse backgrounds. As we discuss the gross disproportionality of system-involved youth of color, we must understand that culturally sensitive policies and practices are essential to successfully heal and prepare youth for meaningful futures. Cultural competence is defined as "the ability to engage in actions or create conditions that maximize the optimal development of client and client services."<sup>1</sup> A culturally competent system understands the need to approach situations differently and shows respect toward those of diverse backgrounds to provide effective services for all children.<sup>2</sup>

MYJC urges this committee to issue a favorable report on SB 905. Should you have any questions about this testimony, please contact Hannah Breakstone, MYJC Coalition Manager and Policy Associate at Advocates for Children and Youth (ACY), at [hbreakstone@acy.org](mailto:hbreakstone@acy.org).

<sup>1</sup> Sue, D.W. and Sue, D., Counseling the Culturally Diverse: Theory and Practice (5<sup>th</sup> Edition).

<sup>2</sup> Cross, T.L., Bazon, B.J., Dennis, K.W., Issac, M.R., Towards a Culturally Competent System of Care: A Monograph on Effective Services for Minority Children Who are Severely Emotionally Disturbed, CASSP Technical Assistance Center, Georgetown University Child Development Center, 1-75 (1989).

