

Boyd K. Rutherford
Lt. GovernorLarry Hogan
GovernorSam Abed
Secretary

DATE: March 3, 2021
BILL NUMBER: SB 853 – Juvenile Law – Juvenile Justice Reform
DJS POSTITION: Support

The Department of Juvenile Services (DJS or department) supports SB 853. This bill implements the recommendations of the Maryland Juvenile Justice Reform Council (JJRC or Council) and represents a comprehensive set of measures to improve and modernize Maryland’s overall approach to juvenile diversion, detention, commitment, supervision, and treatment.

Background

During the 2019 session of the Maryland General Assembly the legislature passed and Governor Hogan signed SB 856 / HB 606, which created the Juvenile Justice Reform Council. The JJRC spent the last year researching best practices regarding the treatment of juveniles who are subject to the criminal and juvenile justice systems and identifying recommendations to limit or otherwise mitigate risk factors that contribute to juvenile contact with the criminal and juvenile justice systems.

Membership

Juvenile Services Secretary Sam Abed chaired the JJRC, which received technical assistance from the Vera Institute for Justice. The Vera Institute gathered and presented data and provided a national perspective to inform the work of the Council. In addition to legislators, the Council included representatives from the judiciary, prosecutors and defense lawyers, state and local child-serving agencies, law enforcement, representatives from national and local organizations with experience in juvenile justice policy reform, and members with lived experience in the juvenile justice system.

Public Input

The Council began its work by conducting 16 separate listening sessions held in every region of the state; more than 530 individuals testified at these events. Informed by these conversations, the Council surveyed its membership before setting priority areas for consideration.

Race Equity

Recognizing the key role of racial equity in juvenile justice and reform, the Council voted to include race equity measures when reviewing specific issue areas and to review recommendations through a race equity lens.

Final Report and Recommendations

The Juvenile Justice Reform Council’s final report, issued in January 2021, made the recommendations to the General Assembly which are outlined in the attached materials.¹

SB 853 brings the consensus-driven reforms considered and decided upon by the Council into law. These changes protect the public through a data-driven and research-based approach to reforms that prioritizes positive outcomes for youth and our communities.

For these reasons, DJS urges a favorable report for SB 853.

¹ <http://dls.maryland.gov/pubs/prod/NoPbITabMtg/CmsnJuvRefCncl/JJRC-Final-Report.pdf>