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Lt. GovernorLarry Hogan
GovernorSam Abed
Secretary

Date: February 25, 2021
Bill Number: HB 68 - Baltimore City and Prince George's County - Diversionary and Reentry Program
DJS Position: Letter of Information

The Department of Juvenile Services (DJS or department) is providing information for HB 68. HB 68 creates a diversionary and reentry program for at-risk youth and youth offenders specific to Baltimore City and Prince George's County by establishing a judicial research and youth development center in each of those jurisdictions run through the local State's Attorney. These centers would supervise 150 individuals who are at least 16 years old and under the age of 25 years who fit specific criteria and are referred by the courts, committed to DJS, or serving jail or prison sentences.

The Juvenile Justice Reform Council (JJRC): Recommendations – Diversion

The JJRC, with the assistance of the Vera Institute of Justice, 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 these systems. A key goal is to avoid drawing youth into the formal juvenile justice system unnecessarily. The Council surveyed practices nationwide, heard from national experts in the field, and made the following recommendations as to diversion:

- ✓ Require informal adjustment for all first-time referrals for misdemeanor and non-violent felony offenses, except firearm offenses.
- ✓ Eliminate requirement of victim consent for informal adjustment while retaining victim notification procedures.
- ✓ Eliminate requirement for State's Attorney approval to proceed with an informal adjustment for non-violent felonies.
- ✓ Expand use of citation offenses and allow for police diversion for citation offenses.
- ✓ Narrow definition of "delinquent act" to conform with COMAR so that responses to certain school based behavior be administered by the school.
- ✓ Require the Governor's Office of Crime Prevention, Youth & Victim Services to develop a model diversion program.

DJS Currently Provides Critical Re-entry and Aftercare Services

The DJS re-entry process is managed by a team of regional re-entry specialists, whose primary function is to increase communication among essential stakeholders, from placement in treatment to a young person's return home. To ensure services are not interrupted, re-entry teams meet to determine the youth's housing plan, educational/ occupational needs, ongoing behavioral/somatic health service requirements, and family relationships, all of which are reviewed so that treatment and services transfer seamlessly.

Families of committed youth are invited and encouraged to participate in the re-entry planning process as partners. Families are supported by the DJS/Maryland Coalition for Families partnership, which features peer support specialists; each peer support specialist is a parent or guardian who formerly had a child involved in the juvenile justice system. Youth remain with DJS until a court terminates supervision and youth may – and often do - continue on supervision and receiving services after turning 18 years old.

After the youth has been in the community for 30 days, a DJS re-entry specialist follows up to assure that the youth has accessed all needed services, has successfully re-enrolled in their local public school if needed, and has remained in stable housing. The DJS strategic re-entry plan allows caseworkers to slowly decrease the time between meetings to gradually reduce DJS involvement when appropriate. The Department utilizes the re-entry coordinators in each of the six DJS regions who serve as liaisons between case managers, local schools and community resources to fully implement re-entry goals.