



Helping People, Changing Lives

February 28, 2024

The Honorable Ben Barnes
Maryland House of Delegates
121 Taylor House Office Building
6 Bladen Street
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Dear Delegate Barnes,

The Anne Arundel County Community Action Agency strongly supports House Bill 1136 which will designate funding for Youth Services Bureau (YSB) within the State's budget. The Community Action Agency administered a YSB program at the Stanton Center in Annapolis from 1978 – 2017. During the 39 years the YSB was in operation, Community Action provided important mental health services, in particular family counseling services to assist youth and their families.

The Community Action Agency provided effective services to our community and was able to be responsive to local needs that arose. The Agency offered families a safe place to address difficult issues such as truancy, violence, trauma, bullying, depression, and suicidal ideation. Designating funding to our agency, as well as others, will allow Community Action to guarantee that families in our community can count on this program in times of need. Youth Services Bureaus are mandated in state law to service youth and families by providing group and family counseling, information and referral services, crisis intervention including suicide assessments, and substance use assessments and referrals. Designated funding for Youth Services Bureaus makes sense to ensure that the State continues to have a network of programs providing these services.

HB 1136 would increase the prevention and intervention services desperately needed to address growing youth mental health needs in our young people. A quarter of Maryland's children and adolescents have one or more diagnosed emotional, behavioral, or developmental conditions. In addition, an alarming 13% of children and adolescents report having anxiety or depression.

The funding of this bill would increase services desperately needed to address spiking incidents of juvenile crime and help to make sure that the Juvenile Reform Act of 2022 is successful by providing community-based programs for youth. The services are proven to work in keeping young people out of the criminal justice system, with Youth Services Bureaus consistently having a 95% success rate in diverting youth from juvenile services.

I respectfully request that you support HB 1136 to designate funding for Youth Services Bureau by voting in favor of this legislation.

Respectfully yours,

Charlestine R. Fairley, PhD, Chief Executive Officer

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