
TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS OF SENATE BILL 732

**Department of Juvenile Services and Maryland Department of Health – Inpatient
Program for Children**

**Judicial Proceedings Committee
February 28, 2024**

Social Work Advocates for Social Change urges a favorable report, with amendments, for SB 732. This emergency bill will establish an inpatient treatment alternative to youth incarceration by December 1, 2024. This inpatient facility will use multidisciplinary approaches to address youth’s physical health, mental health, and substance use. As the bill is written, any youth who has been adjudicated delinquent can be treated in the inpatient facility. We recommend adding a community-based treatment program for youth who do not require the crisis stabilization that inpatient treatment can provide.

Experts agree that incarceration is, at best, ineffective and, at worst, detrimental to youth who are considered “delinquent”. Incarceration does not prevent further criminal offenses, damages youth’s mental and physical health, and prevents them from accessing education and employment post-incarceration¹. Negative impacts of incarceration on youth mental health are especially concerning because a “delinquent” status can be attached to youth for an offense as minor as disturbing the peace or trespassing. Residential mental health and substance use treatment has been shown to reduce mental health symptoms, reduce substance use, and increase social functioning².

SB 732 recognizes the benefit of multidisciplinary support for struggling youth, but while multidisciplinary treatment services are beneficial, inpatient treatment is not the best solution for youth. Inpatient treatment should be reserved for individuals who require stabilizing care for serious mental health concerns or suicidality. While some youth who are adjudicated juvenile are likely to need this level of care, it will certainly not be required for every child. Additionally, not all youth who are adjudicated delinquent are incarcerated; they can also be sent to group homes or treatment foster

¹ Mendel, R. (2023). *Why You Incarceration Fails: An Updated Review of the Evidence*. The Sentencing Project. <https://www.sentencingproject.org/reports/why-youth-incarceration-fails-an-updated-review-of-the-evidence/>

² Mallett, C. and Boitel, C. (2016). *From Juvenile Offender Institutions to Residential Treatment Centers: Evidence of the Shifting Paradigm to Improved Youth and Community Outcomes*. *Journal of Evidence-Informed Social Work*, 13:155-164.



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homes. An inpatient treatment option would further remove these youth from their communities unnecessarily.

We suggest adding a provision for community-based wraparound services into SB 732 to increase positive outcomes for youth adjudicated delinquent. Wraparound services are a multidisciplinary model where youth are professionally supported in their homes, families, and communities. There is promising evidence that wraparound services are more beneficial than incarceration or “treatment as usual”³. A wraparound program in Pennsylvania, Youth Advocate Programs, Inc., found that 87% of their participants were living safely in the community at discharge and 88% were involved in school or GED preparation⁴. Wraparound services could be used in lieu of or in addition to inpatient treatment. For youth with less acute mental health and substance use concerns, a wraparound program would give access to needed treatment while the youth is integrated into their community. This model can help heal family and community relationships that cannot be addressed in the isolation of inpatient treatment⁴. These services could aid youth with more acute concerns in transitioning from confinement to their communities while preserving the progress they made while inpatient.

SB 732 will benefit youth adjudicated delinquent, especially with the recommended amendments. As social workers and citizens of Maryland, we are invested in supporting and caring for our youth and this bill is an important step in that direction.

We urge you to issue a favorable report, with proposed amendments, for SB 732.

Social Work Advocates for Social Change is a coalition of MSW students at the University of Maryland School of Social Work that seeks to promote equity and justice through public policy, and to engage the communities impacted by public policy in the policymaking process.

³ Development Services Group, Inc. (2014). *Wraparound Process*. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. https://ojjdp.ojp.gov/model-programs-guide/literature-reviews/wraparound_process.pdf

⁴ Youth Advocate Programs, Inc. (2024). *Our Impact: Changing Systems and Biographies*. <https://www.yapinc.org/Our-Impact>