

# MARYLAND ALLIANCE FOR JUSTICE REFORM

Working together for a criminal justice system that serves our communities



## [The Safer Communities Conciliation Act](#)

### **What's the Problem?**

[Evidence-based studies](#) show that many offenders can be identified as “low risk.” That is, even without incarceration, they are unlikely to reoffend.

[Studies show incarceration actually can make low-risk offenders more likely to commit new offenses](#): Higher-risk inmates become the role models of lower risk, youthful offenders and, also, these lower-risk offenders are cut off from their families, communities and support networks.

### **What's the Proposal?**

This program offers a victim the chance to sit at the table with an offender (and, for juveniles, with their parents), to hear an apology, and to reach an agreement for restitution or other remedies.

“Restorative justice” programs—such as Johns Hopkins’ successful [Community Conferencing](#)—demonstrate that they can deter youthful and low-risk offenders without prosecution and incarceration.

### **Will this Work?**

[Community Conferencing](#), now in some Maryland jurisdictions, reports participants’ 90%+ satisfaction rates, speedy resolutions (within 60 days), rarity of recurrences, and elimination of alleged offense records that can impede future employment.

[One study](#) found a statistically significant decrease in repeat police calls for services for cases that were mediated compared to cases that were not.

[Another study](#) also demonstrates a decrease in repeat use of police and courts in mediated cases compared to those that were not mediated.

The community conferencing process works and can demonstrate [excellent statistical results](#).

Lorig Charkoudian, the executive director of the [Maryland Association of Community Mediation Centers](#) (MACMC), reported on the [effectiveness of mediation](#) in reducing police calls. In addition he measured the [cost savings](#) to the police departments resulting from fewer calls.

### **The Legislation**

Existing law encourages Maryland prosecutors to divert from prosecution, or even dismiss charges for, offenders who obtain alcohol or substance abuse treatment. Amending Title 6 of Maryland's Criminal Procedure Article, MAJR's proposed bill would permit similar treatment for offenders who enter into and successfully complete community conferencing agreements.

[Read the proposed legislation here.](#)

### **Learn More!**

Use of restorative justice programs, such as community conferencing, has spread [nationwide with bi-partisan support](#).

Community conferencing, coincidentally, will help reduce racial disparities to African-American and other minorities whose economic and educational disadvantages cause them to be disproportionately convicted and punished in our criminal justice system.

[Research shows](#) that black and white youths abuse drugs and commit offenses at similar rates, but minorities end up with worse results, due to their socio-economic disadvantages.

### **Contact your Legislators**

Voice your opinion about this initiative to your legislators. Here is a list of the [members of the Maryland General Assembly](#) with links to their web pages. To find who represents you in the Assembly, [click here](#).

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