

Maryland Alliance for Justice Reform

Working together for a criminal justice system that better serves our communities



To: Delegate Moreno and Members of the Committee

February 26, 2026

From: Lucy Y. Steinitz, MAJR Executive Committee

Subject: **HB0921: Juvenile Law – Confinement & Restrictive Housing --
Limitations**

Delegate Gabriel Moreno and Members of the House Judiciary Committee:

On behalf of the Maryland Alliance for Justice Reform (MAJR), I respectfully urge the Committee to vote in favor of HB0921. MAJR is a nonpartisan, all-volunteer organization of nearly 2,000 Marylanders who advocate for sensible, evidence-based legislative and policy changes in Maryland's correctional practices. We support reforms that reduce recidivism, promote rehabilitation, and enhance public safety.

HB0921 places clear, humane limits on the use of restrictive housing for incarcerated minors. It recognizes what research and lived experience have shown for a long time: Isolating young people—whose brains are still developing and who are uniquely vulnerable to trauma—can cause significant psychological harm and undermine rehabilitation. Specifically, the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry has warned that solitary confinement of juveniles can lead to depression, anxiety, psychosis, and increased risk of suicide, and has recommended that it be banned for youth. The American Academy of Pediatrics likewise concludes that isolation poses serious risks to adolescents' mental health given their ongoing brain development. Federal findings from the U.S. Department of Justice show that youth subjected to isolation report significantly higher rates of self-harm and psychological distress.

Importantly, limiting the use of restrictive housing does not compromise safety. The bill takes this aspect into account. At its center, however, this bill emphasizes evidence-based approaches that emphasize developmentally appropriate interventions, behavioral supports, and structured programming are more effective at maintaining order while preparing young people for successful reentry. Policies that reduce trauma and promote accountability are far more likely to lower recidivism and strengthen long-term public safety.

HB0921 reflects a balanced approach—protecting vulnerable youth from harmful practices while preserving the tools necessary to maintain institutional safety. It aligns Maryland with best practices and with a growing bipartisan recognition that children in custody require age-appropriate standards of care.

For these reasons, MAJR respectfully urges a favorable vote on HB0921.

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