

# Maryland Alliance for Justice Reform

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



To: Chair Will Smith and Judicial Proceedings Committee members  
From: Lucy Y. Steinitz, MAJR Executive Committee  
Subject: **FAV - SB0537 - Youth Delinquency Fund - Establishment**

February 19, 2026

The Maryland Alliance for Justice Reform (MAJR) supports Senate Bill 537, which establishes the Youth Delinquency Prevention Fund. MAJR is a nonpartisan, all-volunteer organization of nearly 2,000 Marylanders committed to advancing evidence-based reforms that strengthen public safety, promote justice, and build healthier communities.

SB 537 advances a preventive, research-informed approach to public safety by investing in community-based programs that address the root causes of youth justice system involvement. The bill creates a dedicated, nonlapsing fund to support grants for delinquency prevention, youth suicide prevention, substance abuse prevention, youth development, family stabilization, and youth advocacy, prioritizing early intervention over reactive, punitive responses.

National research shows that declining crime rates across the country are attributable, in part, to sustained investments in youth delinquency prevention programs, early intervention services, and community-based supports (including findings from the CDC, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, and the National Institute of Justice). These prevention strategies reduce future justice system involvement, lower recidivism, improve long-term outcomes for young people, and enhance public safety more effectively than punishment-centered approaches. The most effective prevention programs are those that are led by peers or directly impacted individuals, especially involving youth of color (who are disproportionately represented in the delinquency system).

SB 537 also establishes strong fiscal and accountability protections by ensuring that funds are used only for their intended purposes, are supplemental to existing appropriations, and are subject to audit and transparent annual reporting. Importantly, the bill protects the fund from “reversion,” meaning that unspent funds do not disappear back into the State’s General Fund at the end of the fiscal year but remain available for future prevention grants, ensuring continuity, stability, and long-term planning. In addition, SB 537 does not add any new funding to the current fiscal year’s budget; it simply creates the legal structure and safeguards necessary for future appropriations and sustainable investment.

The most ethical, cost-effective, and public-safety-centered justice policy is prevention. For these reasons, the Maryland Alliance for Justice Reform respectfully urges a favorable vote on Senate Bill 537.

**Maryland Alliance for Justice Reform, Inc.**

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