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MARYLAND DEPARTMENT OF JUVENILE SERVICES

FISCAL YEAR 2026 OPERATING BUDGET

RESPONSE TO DEPARTMENT OF LEGISLATIVE SERVICES ANALYSIS

**APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE
HOUSE PUBLIC SAFETY AND ADMINISTRATION
SUBCOMMITTEE
DELEGATE JAZZ LEWIS, CHAIR
February 6, 2025**

**BUDGET AND TAXATION COMMITTEE
SENATE PUBLIC SAFETY, TRANSPORTATION AND
ENVIRONMENT SUBCOMMITTEE
SENATOR MICHAEL A JACKSON, CHAIR
February 10, 2025**

Introduction

The Department of Juvenile Services remains committed to advancing reforms that enhance public safety, promote fairness, and improve efficiency through direct community engagement. Over the past year, DJS has strengthened partnerships with local communities to support youth returning home and those receiving services in the community. By expanding community-based and facility programming, DJS aims to hold youth accountable while fostering public safety. Our focus remains on reducing recidivism and promoting educational attainment, workforce development, civic engagement, and other positive youth development opportunities that have been shown to reduce recidivism and improve outcomes.

Community Enhancements:

Rebuilding the community-based service continuum is a top priority. To lead this effort, DJS created and hired an Assistant Secretary for Community Services to develop and expand local service networks. With an \$850,000 federal grant, DJS is conducting a service scan, identifying gaps, evaluating programs, and creating a stakeholder feedback process. While this process is underway, DJS has already taken steps to strengthen early intervention efforts, expand Thrive Academy, and increase workforce development opportunities.

In response to identified service gaps, DJS expanded partnerships with community conferencing groups to provide diversion services at the system's front end. We are also working with the Governor's Office of Crime Control and Prevention (GOCCP), the Governor's Office for Children (GOC), and Local Management Boards (LMBs) to align funding and programs to fill these gaps.

To address the urgent issue of gun violence among youth under our supervision—many of whom are victims—DJS launched the Thrive Academy in September 2023. This intensive, community-based program began in four counties that accounted for 82% of youth involved in gun violence in FY 2023. Early outcomes are promising: fewer than 2% of Thrive youth have been gun violence victims, none have been homicide victims, and 4 out of 5 have not been arrested for a gun offense. Thrive's credible messengers have repeatedly de-escalated conflicts, preventing retaliatory violence.

Thrive Academy received the 2024 Council of Juvenile Justice Administrators (CJJA) Inspiration Innovation Award, recognizing its groundbreaking impact. The program will undergo an independent evaluation by the University of Pennsylvania, a national expert in gun violence reduction, funded by the Casey and Pull Up Foundations. Statewide expansion is underway, with DJS providing technical assistance to grassroots groups interested in serving as life coaches. The first Expression of Interest closed in December 2024, with another issued last week.

Expanding vocational and employment opportunities is another key priority. Previously, programming in this area was minimal despite strong demand from youth. In late 2023, DJS established the Office of Workforce Development to strengthen partnerships with state and local workforce agencies. As a result, summer and year-round youth employment slots have significantly increased. In the summer of 2024, DJS contracted for 128 employment slots, filling 123. An additional 86 year-round slots were created for in-school and out-of-school youth in 2024-2025.

The Youth Opportunities to Learn Occupations (YOLO) program, launched in partnership with the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE), provides paid work experience for youth in our facilities. Off-grounds opportunities are available for those with a high school diploma or GED who have earned our staff's trust through their behavior while in our care, while on-grounds experiences focus on culinary and maintenance training.

DJS is also working to expand subsidized work experience for youth, including apprenticeships and career opportunities. GED preparation, job training, and work readiness support are integral to these efforts. The Baltimore Vacants Reinvestment Initiative (formerly Core 2.0) is the furthest along this process, but expansion is planned across various industries and regions.

The Safer Stronger Together (SST) initiative, formerly the Community Investment Initiative, is a collaboration between DJS, the Department of Human Services, and the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services. Identifying over 2,000 Maryland families involved with multiple systems, the initiative launched pilot sites in Salisbury, Hagerstown, and East Baltimore City. Community advisory boards have been established at each site, meeting monthly to develop crime reduction strategies. An RFP process has engaged grassroots groups and nonprofits to work with youth aged 13-25 and their families. Each site has also hired family navigators to assist high-risk, high-need families, many of whom face multi-generational justice system involvement and poverty. Like Thrive, SST will undergo an independent evaluation.

Residential Enhancements:

In FY 2024, the number of youth pending placement in residential treatment programs—and the length of their wait—was alarming. DJS established Pending Placement Units at the Baltimore City Juvenile Justice Center (BCJJC) and Cheltenham Youth Detention Center to address this. Youth from Lower Eastern Shore Children's Center and Charles H. Hickey, Jr. School are transferred to these units once committed by the court.

While in a pending placement unit, youth immediately receive evidence-based treatment services that count toward their treatment plans at Green Ridge Youth Center, Backbone Mountain Youth Center, or Victor Cullen Center—just as they would in a residential facility. This not only gets services to young people much sooner, but it prevents them from becoming frustrated because they're doing “dead time” which doesn't count towards their release date. Services include individual sessions focused on treatment readiness and family therapy, ensuring youth make meaningful progress while awaiting placement. The DJS residential leadership team meets regularly to monitor outcomes and develop strategies to improve placements and transitions. Since launching the pending placement units, the number of weekly treatment hours for youth has consistently increased.

At the same time, DJS has implemented several initiatives to enhance programming, improve staff capacity, and create meaningful opportunities for youth:

- Expanded educational programming in partnership with the Juvenile Services Education Program continues to have after-school activities to reduce idle time and keep youth engaged.
- Opportunities for off-grounds outings and structured trips for eligible youth, restoring opportunities for positive community service opportunities and real-world learning experiences.
- Reduced staff vacancy rates in facilities, from 18.5% in January 2023 to 5.9% in January 2025, improving stability, safety, and service delivery.

- Implementation of Innovation Teams to work with front-line staff and young people to get their ideas on how to drive cutting-edge reforms across DJS facilities, enhancing programming, behavioral interventions, and reentry supports to improve youth outcomes.

As the analysis pointed out, youth charged as adults now account for over 60% of the detained population and remain in juvenile detention nearly 100 days longer than youth in the juvenile system. This extended stay strains detention center operations, which are not designed for long-term confinement, and delays critical behavioral interventions that reduce recidivism and improve outcomes. Nearly 87% of the cases charged in the adult system are dismissed, sent to juvenile court, or sentenced to time served. Beyond these operational challenges, Maryland spends an estimated \$23.7 million annually to house youth charged as adults in juvenile detention facilities.

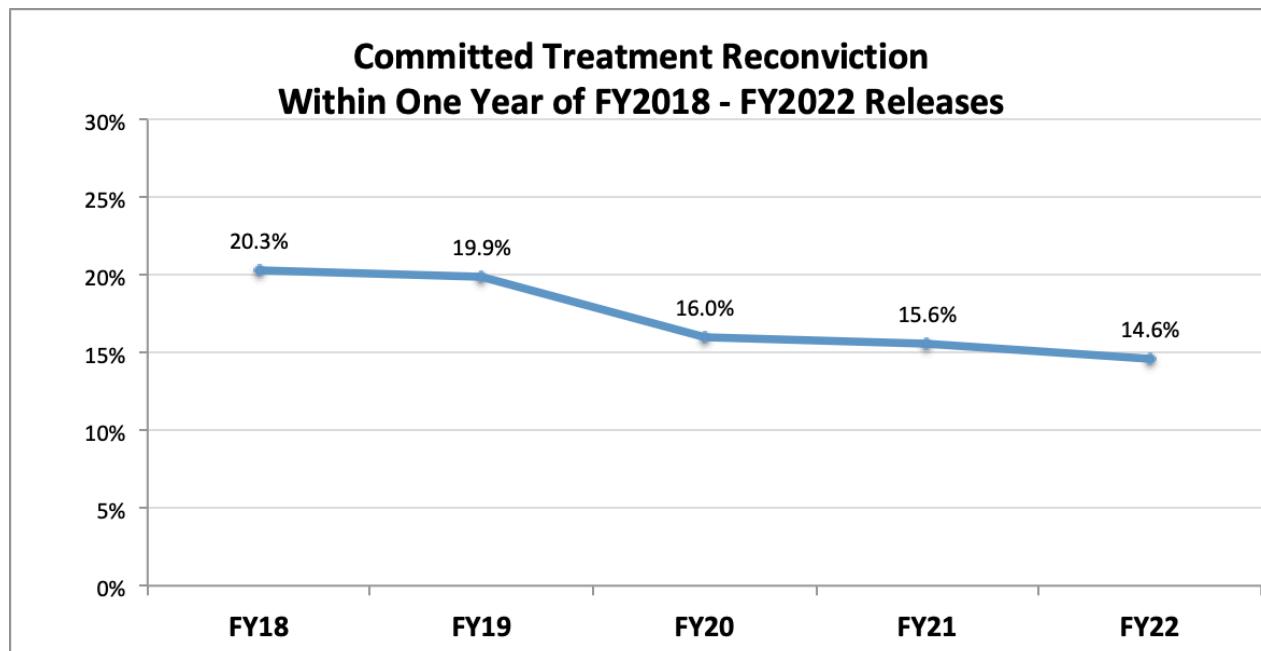
Responses

Page 19 - DJS should comment on why there was insufficient data collection on Strategic Reentry Plan measures in fiscal 2024 for most of its planned measures and whether similar issues will persist in its next MFR submission. The department should also provide information on its rearrest, readjudication, and recommitment rates within one, two, and three years of release from DJS supervision.

Response:

The insufficient data collection on Strategic Reentry Plan measures in fiscal 2024 was primarily due to low completion rates for the Post-Discharge Reentry Checklists, which serve as the primary source for reentry metrics. To address this, DJS Community Services and Research staff have implemented measures to improve data tracking, including the addition of reports in the SafeMeasures platform to monitor completion rates and enhance accountability.

Recidivism metrics are now available in the FY2024 Data Resource Guide.



Overall Recidivism Rates for Treatment Program Releases

6-, 12-, 24-, AND 36-MONTH JUVENILE AND/OR CRIMINAL JUSTICE RECIDIVISM RATES FOR FY 2021-2023 RELEASES

Follow-up Period	FY2021 (N=263)			FY2022 (N=240)			FY2023 (N=232)		
	Rearrest	Re-conviction	Re-incarceration	Rearrest	Re-conviction	Re-incarceration	Rearrest	Re-conviction	Re-incarceration
6 Months	26.2%	9.9%	6.1%	35.8%	9.6%	6.3%	38.8%		
12 Months	40.3%	15.6%	10.3%	46.7%	14.6%	9.2%	52.6%		
24 Months	53.6%	21.3%	12.5%	60.4%	21.7%	12.9%			
36 Months	57.8%	27.0%	15.2%						

- 85.4% of youth released in FY 2022 were successful at 12 months, meaning they were not reconvicted of a new offense.

While DJS reports rearrest, readjudication, and recommitment rates, there is national consensus that readjudication is the most reliable indicator of recidivism. Rearrest rates can be influenced by law enforcement practices, often resulting in charges that do not lead to adjudication. Similarly, reincarceration rates reflect judicial responses rather than youth behavior alone, as similar cases may receive different placement decisions, with only out-of-home placements counting toward reincarceration.

Page 21 - DJS should comment on how its data systems will interact with CJAMS in the future, and whether it plans to pursue upgrades to or a replacement of ASSIST.

Response:

DJS remains actively engaged with the Department of Information Technology (DoIT), MDTHINK and CJAMS representatives to ensure seamless bi-directional data sharing related to youth and families between DJS systems and CJAMS, both now and in the future.

A final decision has not yet been made regarding the hosting environment for a new case management system. Potential options include internal hosting by DJS or integration with the MD THINK platform. In fall 2024, DJS collaborated with DoIT to analyze CJAMS and assess DJS's unique client-based needs. While an executive summary of this analysis has been completed, DJS is awaiting the full "sprint" report.

DJS is working with DoIT and DBM to determine the best path forward to meet DJS case management needs.

Page 25 - Given that there has not yet been time to demonstrate the effectiveness of this program, especially considering startup delays due to the BPW reductions, the Department of Legislative Services (DLS) recommends reducing the general fund appropriation for the Enhance Services Continuum by \$4.2 million to the level previously authorized by the General Assembly in fiscal 2025.

Response:

DJS respectfully opposes the recommendation to reduce the general fund appropriation for the Enhanced Services Continuum by \$4.2 million. The demand for expanded community-based services continues to grow, and key stakeholders—including the courts, prosecutors, law enforcement, families, advocates, and local jurisdictions—have consistently called on DJS to strengthen the service continuum. These funds are critical to continuing that work and ensuring youth access innovative, effective, evidence-based support.

One of the core components of many of the services we seek to expand is credible messenger mentoring, which already has strong data demonstrating its effectiveness. DJS has invested significant effort in building these programs, and early outcomes confirm their impact:

- Thrive Academy: Since launch, no participant has been a victim of a homicide, and nearly 4 out of 5 have remained free of gun-related charges.
- ACCESS: Of the 54 youth enrolled since April of 2024, 3 youth have been re-arrested, and all of them have appeared for court.

These results align with national research. Credible messenger mentoring is recognized as an Effective Rated Practice by the U.S. Department of Justice's Crime Solutions Clearinghouse, and similar models—such as the Spotlight Serious Offender Services Program—have demonstrated significant reductions in recidivism.

Expanding the community-based service continuum requires partnerships with innovative programs that build on existing evidence and continue to demonstrate effectiveness. DJS has already identified and integrated key programs that align with best practices in juvenile justice, providing youth with the support they need while reducing reliance on costly and ineffective secure placements.

Page 25 - DLS recommends deleting the general fund appropriation of \$3.0 million to reopen the Catoctin Treatment Center due to its absence from the department's 2024 FMP.

Response:

DJS respectfully opposes the deletion of the \$3.0 million general fund appropriation intended to support residential substance use treatment services for youth. While the Catoctin Treatment Center is not included in the FMP, the agency recognizes the critical need for expanding inpatient treatment beds, a need that has been echoed by key stakeholders, including from state's attorneys across the state.

DJS remains committed to partnering with the Maryland Department of Health and other relevant entities to identify viable options for bringing residential substance use treatment services online. This funding is essential to ensuring that youth with significant treatment needs can access appropriate care. Rather than eliminating these funds, DJS is prepared to explore alternative approaches, including potential partnerships with private providers or other entities, to establish sustainable, high-quality treatment options in the community.

Page 26 - DJS should discuss the impact of its high vacancy rate (above 10%) on agency operations, program outcomes, and youth safety.

Response:

As referenced in Exhibit #5 of the analysis; nonresidential case loads dropped by 69.7% between 2015 and 2022; however there has not been a comparable reduction in the number of community case management positions. As new or modified community based programming for youth is implemented, DJS continues to assess appropriate caseloads for case management positions. To the extent that surplus positions are identified, case management or any other classification, those positions will be realigned to best address positive outcomes for youth and safety for both staff and youth.

Page 29 - OOHP -The department provided the requested information to the committees, and DLS therefore recommends the release of withheld funds and will process a letter to this effect if no objections are raised during the budget hearings.

Response: DJS Agrees

Page 29 - DJS should provide the number of youths who have spent time in the pending placement units and discuss how DJS delivers treatment services to these youths.

Response:

Since opening in July 2023, the Pending Placement Units have maintained an average daily population of approximately 24 youth, with about 14 at BCJJJC and 10 at Cheltenham. As of January 31, 2025, 351 unique youth had been housed in the Pending Placement Units, with 33 currently listed as residing there.

Since the program's inception, youth in the Pending Placement Unit have received an average about 4.1 hours of treatment per week. We are gradually increasing the weekly treatment hours for pending placement youth as we onboard additional behavioral health staff; for example, as of January 31, 2025, youth currently on the unit have received an average of 4.9 hours of weekly treatment.

Treatment services include individual and family Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT) sessions, as appropriate, as well as psycho-educational groups with clinicians, such as Forward Thinking and victim awareness. Clinicians or residential staff may facilitate group skills practice, while residential staff generally provide coaching.

Page 30 - The department provided the requested FMP to the committees, and DLS therefore recommends the release of withheld funds and will process a letter to this effect if no objections are raised during the budget hearings

Response: DJS Agrees