



Introducing the Youth Rights & Safety Hub (YRSH), a new Maryland resource focused on providing up-to-date information about youth justice, youth rights, and youth safety.

Everyone deserves to be safe, with the opportunity to thrive. That's why YRSH is committed to helping decision makers and the public understand the latest news and data about youth involved in Maryland's legal systems. The Youth Rights & Safety Hub is guided by an Advisory Committee of policy experts, youth-serving organizations, and representatives of diverse communities across the state. Going forward, we'll be sharing informational resources and data debriefs about youth rights and safety issues that concern us all.

Watch for YRSH in your inbox, visit our website (marylandyouthsafety.org) and reach out when you need to connect with our members or need additional resources. To get started, we've assembled a recap of important youth rights and safety information from 2024 that you may have missed, as well as some recent developments:

Violence Prevention Works - 2024 Recap of Successful Prevention Efforts in Maryland. When Baltimore announced its historic 2024 decline in gun violence, everyone lined up to take credit. WYPR produced this audio report on the contribution of gun violence interrupters: [Homicides dropped in Baltimore in 2024. What role did violence interrupters play?](#) (WYPR, 1/13/25).

Jen Paulilikonis, formerly Director of Policy and Programming at the Johns Hopkins Center for Gun Violence Solutions, has been named Executive Director of the Maryland Center for Firearm Violence Prevention and Intervention. The [authorizing legislation](#), passed in 2024, requires the center to send the governor and general assembly a preliminary state plan for a public health approach to reducing firearm violence on or before May 1, 2025.

ACEs High in Prison. In late 2024, the nonprofit group Human Rights for Kids issued a report showing astonishingly high rates of Adverse Childhood Events (ACEs) among Maryland inmates incarcerated since childhood. According to [Disposable Children: The Prevalence of Child Abuse and Trauma Among Children Prosecuted and Incarcerated as Adults in Maryland](#), **70% of survey respondents incarcerated since childhood reported experiencing six or more ACEs prior to their incarceration. Less than a third reported ever receiving treatment to address these traumas.** As [Maryland Matters reports](#), ending Maryland's high rate of charging youths as adults is likely to be on this season's legislative agenda.

Senate Hearing on OPEGA report. Last week, the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee (JPR) held a four-hour hearing about a December 2024 [report](#) produced by the General Assembly's non-

partisan [Office of Program Evaluation and Government Accountability](#) (OPEGA). Observers witnessed a detailed review of community-based programming for youth and learned about long-standing mismanagement of the Department of Juvenile Services (DJS) under the prior administration. For example, the report highlighted large service gaps and delayed access to programming during the Hogan administration—when the agency returned tens of millions of dollars to the state rather than invest in a more responsive suite of services. The report also lamented the agency's decades-old database system ASSIST (Automated Statewide System of Information Support Tools). During questioning, DJS Secretary Vinny Schiraldi agreed with the critique and added that the expensive replacement initiated before his arrival at DJS had to be rejected after staff found it inadequate. Secretary Schiraldi also noted that DJS had a 17 percent vacancy rate when he started at the agency in 2023; the current rate, he said, is 11 percent. For more information about how DJS declined during the Hogan administration, see [Why Larry Hogan's smaller government came at a cost to Marylanders](#), Baltimore Banner, 10/29/2024.

Most media coverage repeated prior allegations about the agency rather than noting many of the positive highlights from the OPEGA report, including data that found DJS has been detaining more youth, not less in the most recent years. The percentage of cases DJS "formalized" —meaning, that the agency referred to state's attorneys for possible prosecution—has increased, for example, and DJS intake staff, when they deviate from the recommendations of the department's intake risk assessment tool, usually recommend more supervision, not less. Maryland Matters has [more about the hearing](#).

Commission on Juvenile Justice Reform & Emerging and Best Practices. The commission created by [HB814](#) in 2024 to oversee and enhance the juvenile justice system, has begun its work. Learn more in this interview with the commission's chair, retired Justice Andre Davis — [New chair of Commission on Juvenile Justice Reform speaks with 11 News](#) (WBALTV) 10/31/2024. The commission's third meeting, originally scheduled for January 9, was postponed, and may be rescheduled. Follow the commission, access meeting materials, and find the meeting schedule [at their website](#).

Upcoming

We are preparing for the release of the most important dataset of the year, the Department of Juvenile Service's annual Data Resource Guide. Once the report is released, our team will review the data and provide a memo with highlights and need-to-know information. Stay tuned.

This message has been authorized and paid for by Advance Maryland.