

M A R Y L A N D

Youth Rights & Safety Hub



Welcome to the April 2026 Youth Rights & Safety Hub (YRSH) newsletter! YRSH is non-political and non-partisan. We seek to educate, not advocate. We do this by sharing relevant resources and data debriefs about youth rights and safety issues in our state.

Spotlight

Desistance and Its Meaning for Youth Justice Policy

“‘Resistance’ applies to things we want to keep away. ‘Persistence’ refers to things that last. ‘Desistance’ signals things that decline and go away on their own. For most kids touched by the justice system, desistance is the best description of future offending: The simple experience of aging is sufficient to change behavior. Brain development, soft skill acquisition, and an evolving sense of identity are some of the elements that contribute to the desistance process. Most experts agree that desistance should be a key consideration in setting youth justice system practices.”

[READ THE FULL STORY HERE](#)

A Woman Named Medusa by Dayonna Wilkerson

“As Sexual Assault Awareness Month and National Poetry Month draw to a close, we share this piece as part of our commitment to amplifying the voices that speak truth to power and healing through art.” This is a fictional poem about Medusa written by a Baltimore City youth, part of a new generation using creative expression to process difficult truths and imagine pathways toward justice and healing. We offer this work with care.

[READ THE POEM HERE](#)

April [Views on the News](#)

Like it or not, we must pay attention to the media—because the stories they tell shape how many people think about youth justice. Including elected officials and young people themselves! Is the reporting fair? Are the headlines accurate? What stories are being told...and what is being left out?

“Copaganda.” That’s how civil rights lawyer Alec Karakatsanis describes the way law enforcement and media often work together to push back on justice reform.¹ The passage of the Youth Charging Reform Act (YCRA) this month suggests the phenomenon is alive and well here in Maryland.

In the weeks since April 6, when the General Assembly gave final approval to the bill, several local media outlets have given substantial air time and print space to critics of the legislation—particularly police, prosecutors, and elected officials who voted against it. That coverage—short on reliable facts and long on opinion—seems all but intended to raise doubt about the YCRA and keep audiences frightened of kids.

On April 20, WBAL Radio hosted frequent guest Baltimore State’s Attorney Ivan Bates for a 20+ minute critique of the bill.² “It is a bill that I, as a prosecutor, and the other 24 prosecutors across the state, none of us supported,” Bates said during the interview, predicting the legislation will have a “major impact” on youth offending.

That same day, WBBF (Fox 45) ran a segment of its own on the same conversation. The headline on the online version read “Baltimore’s lead prosecutor argues juvenile crime remains unimproved under Maryland’s DJS leadership.”³ The next day, the Sinclair-owned cable station ran a similar segment under the banner “Fewer youth program slots raise concerns of crime spike ahead of summer.”⁴ The reported shortage of programming due to federal budget cuts is real. No evidence was offered, however, to justify talk of a coming “crime spike” beyond a “concern” that crime would increase during the summer.

Just a few days later, on April 24, the Dorchester Star Ledger ran a lengthy article, also mostly critical of the YCRA, headlined “‘Handcuffs on law enforcement’: Youth charging bill not popular with Eastern Shore officials.” Among the many questionable facts in the piece: Dorchester County Sheriff Jimmy Phillips’ claim that young people cause 70 percent of crime in his jurisdiction. (In 2024, youths accounted for only about 12 percent of all arrests statewide.)

Even though the bill does not address policing at all, Sheriff Philips went on to complain that “They’ve placed so many handcuffs on law enforcement dealing with juveniles...I think we’ve probably crossed the river of no return now.” Other opponents of the bill cited in the article include Del. Tom Hutchinson (R-Caroline, Dorchester, Talbot, Wicomico) and Del. Chris Adams (R-Caroline, Dorchester, Talbot, Wicomico), who both voted against the measure.

To her credit, reporter Lily Tierney included at least one statement from a community-based supporter of the legislation. The inclusion was recognition that law enforcement officials are not the only “experts” worthy of quoting:

“‘This bill is a transformative step toward reducing recidivism rates for our youth while maintaining accountability for their actions,’ said Terry Speaks, leadership development organizer for Out for Justice and a former youth charged as an adult, in a statement. ‘We must remember that we are dealing with children primarily from difficult circumstances; our aim should always be rehabilitation to set them on the right path and prevent future offenses. This bill achieves that.’”

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In The News

Featured in This Month's Views on the News

1. [Copaganda: How Police and the Media Manipulate Our News](#), by Alec Karakatsanis, The New Press. April 15, 2025.
2. [Baltimore City State's Attorney Ivan Bates criticizes juvenile justice system gaps](#), WBAL Radio, April 4, 2026.
3. [Baltimore's lead prosecutor argues juvenile crime remains unimproved under Maryland's DJS leadership](#), by Keith Daniels, Fox 45 News, April 20, 2026.
4. [Fewer youth program slots raise concerns of crime spike ahead of summer](#), by Rebecca Pryor, Fox 45 News, April 21, 2026.
5. ['Handcuffs on law enforcement': Youth charging bill not popular with Eastern Shore officials](#), by Lily Tierney, The Star-Democrat, April 24, 2026.

General

- [Envy program revival gains support from Hagerstown](#), by Jessica Swann, Local News 1, April 17, 2026.
- [Silver Oak shutdown calls grow as whistleblower and lawmakers claim violence, med failures](#), by Gary Collins, WJLA, April 17, 2026.
- [The horrifying secret of the child detention center we shared as detainee and warden](#), by Marc Schindler and Tyrone Walker, MSN, March 31, 2026.

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