

MARYLAND

Youth Rights & Safety Hub



Welcome to the October [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

What We Want Baltimore to Know About Us: The Unspoken Voices of Baltimore's Youth by Sela Powell

"We want Baltimore to know that we feel misunderstood, unrepresented, and underestimated. We are capable of so many things, but feel a lack of resources, limelight, and knowledge. We are just figuring things out as individuals, as we are not children, yet we still aren't quite adults. However, society and law are constantly flipping between everyone expecting us to act like adults and the age when we actually become one."

[READ THE FULL STORY HERE](#)

What We Know About Chronic Absenteeism by Rohina Azizian Zavala

"As the Project Manager for the Tackling Chronic Absenteeism Project (TCAP), for the past four years I have worked with Baltimore City school students and their families to develop strategies to overcome obstacles preventing their students from succeeding in school. Underlying all this work is the understanding that chronic absenteeism is most often just a symptom of a much more complex issue - a student/family that is struggling with meeting their basic needs."

[GET THE BREAKDOWN HERE](#)

October Views on the News

Keep Fear Alive

[Crime is down in Baltimore](#) and across the nation—including crime by young people. So with no high-profile incidents to fill their headlines and broadcasts, local media found creative ways

to keep young people and crime in the news.

On October 13, for example, Fox 45 ran a story about a completely unscientific online poll run by a crowd-sourced data company in Belgrade, Serbia, called [Numbeo](#). The headline read, [Baltimore ranked third most dangerous U.S. city by crime index](#), and one had to read all the way to the end to learn that “homicides were down about 50% compared to this time in 2024” and “there had been a 10% decrease in aggravated assaults, a 32% decrease in auto thefts and robberies, and a 31% decrease in carjackings.”

Ten days earlier, the station broadcast a story about WBAL radio interviews with Mayor Brandon Scott and Baltimore Police Chief Richard Worley in which both officials complained about a “small group” of arrested youths alleged to have had multiple prior contacts with law enforcement. The headline: [Baltimore officials voice concern as juvenile crime persists under new DJS leadership](#).

We want to remind readers that crime, including crimes committed by young people remains down, and there’s a lot of work to do at DJS. Ivan Bates commented earlier this month:

“I think it’s very important that people recognize and realize since Secretary Tolentino came in, I personally have seen a change.... And I see the partnership—so I want to recognize that. This is a heavy lift that she has. And I really personally think that the work she is doing right now, she is doing a very good job in my mind from what I have seen in the past.”

—Baltimore States Attorney Ivan Bates, Southeast Baltimore Juvenile Justice Summit, 10/16/25

Manufactured news about kids and crime may attract audiences on traditional and social media. They might even generate votes. But they are a disservice both to kids and to our city. Baltimore can continue to feed the mythology of The Wire, or we can honor our successes in reducing crime and build toward a future where kids, communities, and businesses feel increasingly safe and able to thrive.

Meanwhile, mounting evidence shows the dangers of putting young people in institutions

For much of the month, the [suicide of a 16-year-old girl](#) living in a Baltimore hotel while in custody of the state’s foster care system dominated local news—culminating in a [scathing audit and a bitter hearing in Annapolis](#). Similarly, the National Guard’s Freestate ChalleNGe Academy, which the Baltimore Sun described as “[a boot camp program for at-risk youth](#)”, came under scrutiny for “allegations that teens were attacked, abused and subject to brutal conditions.” Both of these stories followed on the heels of September’s report from the

Maryland Office of the Correctional Ombudsman and the Juvenile Justice Monitoring Unit (OCO/JJMU) of [dangerous conditions at DJS detention facilities](#). And, of course, there's the [rediscovered century-old graveyard](#) at the agency's Cheltenham Detention Center, formerly known as House of Reformation and Instruction for Colored Children.

All these stories underscore a central fact: Institutionalizing young people may sound like a solution, but the practice—in almost any context—is a recipe for danger and dysfunction. The media are doing their part informing the public about the failures of these systems, but their coverage tends to perpetuate the idea that these systems can be fixed. The truth is, however, that even the most enlightened institutional reforms cannot match the benefits that would come from investing in strengthening families and communities so that the rationale for boot camps, child welfare programs, and juvenile detention centers withers and disappears.

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