

M A R Y L A N D

# Youth Rights & Safety Hub



Welcome to the May/June/July 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.

We have a lot to catch up on, so let's get right into it.

## Spotlight

### Interview with Amber Woodruff, Director of Strategy & Research at the Greater Baltimore Committee

The Greater Baltimore Committee (GBC) is a private-sector initiative working to shape our region's reputation, economy, and quality of life. Its 300 members are a Who's Who of Baltimore-area businesses and institutions. Amber Woodruff leads several cross-sector initiatives at GBC, including its recently formed Public Safety Committee. YRSH spoke with Amber about her work at GBC and its relevance for young people living in and around Baltimore.

[READ THE FULL STORY HERE](#)

### Seeking Justice Following a Baltimore County Lynching by Robin Campbell

"This year on July 13th, 141 years after [Howard Cooper's] body was cut from the branch of a sycamore tree and passed to his grieving mother, a crowd gathered near the old stone jailhouse in downtown Towson to remember him and to confront our state's history of racial injustice. The event, hosted by the Baltimore County Lynching Memorial Project, drew leaders from across the region, including Senators Shelly Hettleman, Mary Washington, and Charles Sydnor, Delegates Kathi Forbes and Michele Guyton, Sarah David, who recently won the Democratic party primary for Baltimore County State's Attorney and is unopposed in the general election, and Natasha Dartigue, leader of the state's Office of the Public Defender."

[READ THE FULL STORY HERE](#)

### From Pain to Power: What Baltimore's Youth are Actually Telling Us by Tim Eppers

“Young people in Baltimore are constantly talked about instead of engaged with in conversation. Adults make decisions about their lives without ever sitting across from them. On April 16, Joseph Lacaze, of the Sentencing Project, and I co-facilitated a breakout workshop at Art Rysing in Baltimore called “Baltimore Built Me: Youth Leadership Activation Station.” Our goal was to build a space where youth ages 14 to 17 could identify the issues affecting their lives, explain why those issues matter, name who holds the power, and speak their truth to a crowd — all in one afternoon.”

[READ THE FULL STORY HERE](#)

## Art Rysing Project at UMBC Uses Art to Help Young People Heal by Arisbeth Valencia

“Baltimore’s story does not end with destruction or grief. It also lives in the ways communities continue to organize toward healing. Art has played a key role in this healing through creative diverse expressions, storytelling, music, movement, and community building. One example of this ongoing, powerful organizing is Art Rysing.

“This year marked the 10th Art Rysing event, which was hosted by the Shriver Center’s Choice Program at the University of Maryland Baltimore County (UMBC) in collaboration with 27 nonprofit organizations, students, youth, artists, and UMBC leadership. Centered on truth telling, racial healing, and reclaiming public spaces of belonging, Art Rysing asked participants not only to reflect on collective trauma, but also to imagine what healing can look like when communities create together.”

[READ THE FULL STORY HERE](#)

## June/July [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?*

In recent weeks several media stories have zeroed in on the stark fault line dividing youth justice policies and practices in Maryland and across the nation. A national article in Maryland Matters directly engaged with the phenomenon, which sees some states moving toward reform while others double down on “accountability.”<sup>1</sup>

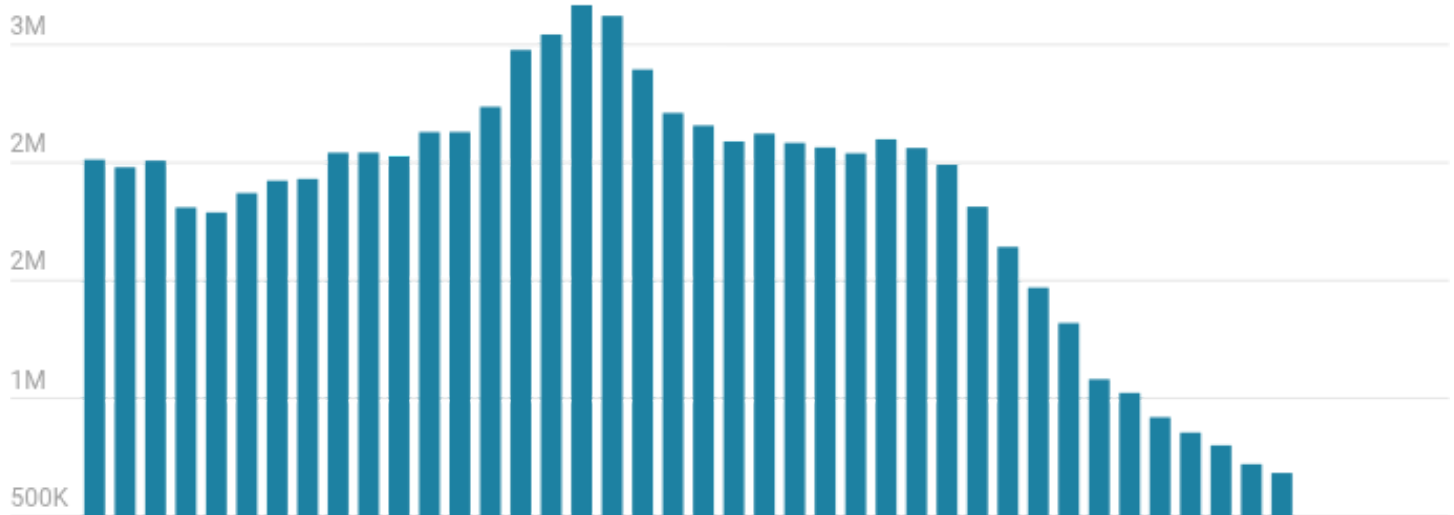
“This year, more than half a dozen states, including Colorado, Hawaii, Kansas, Maryland, Mississippi, Missouri and Utah, have passed new laws reshaping their juvenile legal systems. While some have adopted measures designed to divert more young people from incarceration, others have sought to impose stiffer penalties and expand prosecutors’ authority to pursue adult charges.”

The article, written by Amanda Watford, a national reporter for the online news source’s parent publication, Stateline, cites Maryland’s Youth Charging Reform Act (YCRA) as a case in point. It points to the YCRA not only as an example of a state moving toward reform, but also as a reform that continues to draw fierce opposition, as state’s attorneys across Maryland continue to bitterly oppose the change—endorsed by both the legislature and the governor— even before it goes into effect.

Watford’s coverage is careful, however, to underscore the facts beneath the debate: the continuous and conspicuous decline in youth arrests over the past four decades, as illustrated in the chart below.

## Number of estimated youth arrests, 1980-2024

Youth arrests have declined about 83% since peaking in 1996. Although estimated youth arrests increased during the COVID-19 pandemic from 2021 to 2023, they declined again in 2024 and remain below pre-pandemic levels, with a 34% decrease from 2019 to 2024.



Meanwhile, the Baltimore Sun—which some readers believe has become more comfortable in recent times with the “accountability” faction—wrote a series of surprising articles about public safety meetings in the Baltimore region.

At a July 14 “community listening session”, city residents celebrated the 71 percent drop in homicides since 2022 and voiced support for non-punitive public safety strategies.<sup>2</sup>

“[P]articipants called for expanded youth diversion programs, easier access to identification documents, greater support for residents with disabilities and more public awareness of alternatives to police intervention,” wrote reporter Chevall Pryce.

An article about a Baltimore County “town hall”, published on June 30, showed public safety officials struggling to correct misimpressions about crime trends being fed by social media.<sup>3</sup> Although the county’s crime data dashboard showed a clear decrease in reported crimes from 2024 to 2025 (40,814 v. 44,719), the perception among many participants was that crime in the county was increasing—not only among young people, but generally.

"I'd ask you to try to think about the numbers and not the perception," the county's outgoing state's attorney pleaded, uncharacteristically.

The third Baltimore Sun article, by reporter Maggie Trovato, about another county town hall held on July 22, saw residents once again calling for non-punitive responses to youth offending.<sup>4</sup>

One resident reportedly asked, for example, whether the county and state have a plan to prevent children from being arrested. "'It seems like it's more reactive and not prevention,' she said. 'What is the plan?'"

Another resident, who identified herself as a mother, called for stronger community engagement with young people. "[She] said people should get to know their neighbors and reach out to the young people in the community. She said that they need to have opportunities and activities. She expressed interest in getting a group of parents together to ensure that."

A third participant cited in the article called for a "digital marketing campaign" to alert young people about the consequences of law breaking. Even that strategy—public education—is arguably a shift from the punitive impulses that until recently have driven so much of youth justice rhetoric.

The national conversation on youth justice, and the community-level pivot toward prevention over punitive punishments reflect both a deeper understanding of what actually reduces crime and makes us safer. This good news gives us hope that reforms will be given the opportunity to prove successful, leading to better long-term outcomes and future decisionmaking rooted in data and research. Further evidence of this deeper understanding can be found in a July 9th opinion piece from The Economist, a self-described "centrist" publication, pushing back on new attempts to lower the age of criminal responsibility for minors.<sup>5</sup> Comparing news coverage, whether national or local, to coverage from 18 to 24 months ago, suggests a significant change in how the media reports on youth justice issues.

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Meanwhile, the Baltimore Banner continued to report on the grim homicide statistics emerging from the state's adult prison system. "Since 2023," it reported, "32 incarcerated people in state-run correctional facilities have been killed. That's more than all of Maryland's neighboring states combined."

## Prisoner homicides rose sharply in 2024. The 2025 count is even higher.

The state is on pace for another elevated year in 2026, with seven reported killings so far.

15 homicides

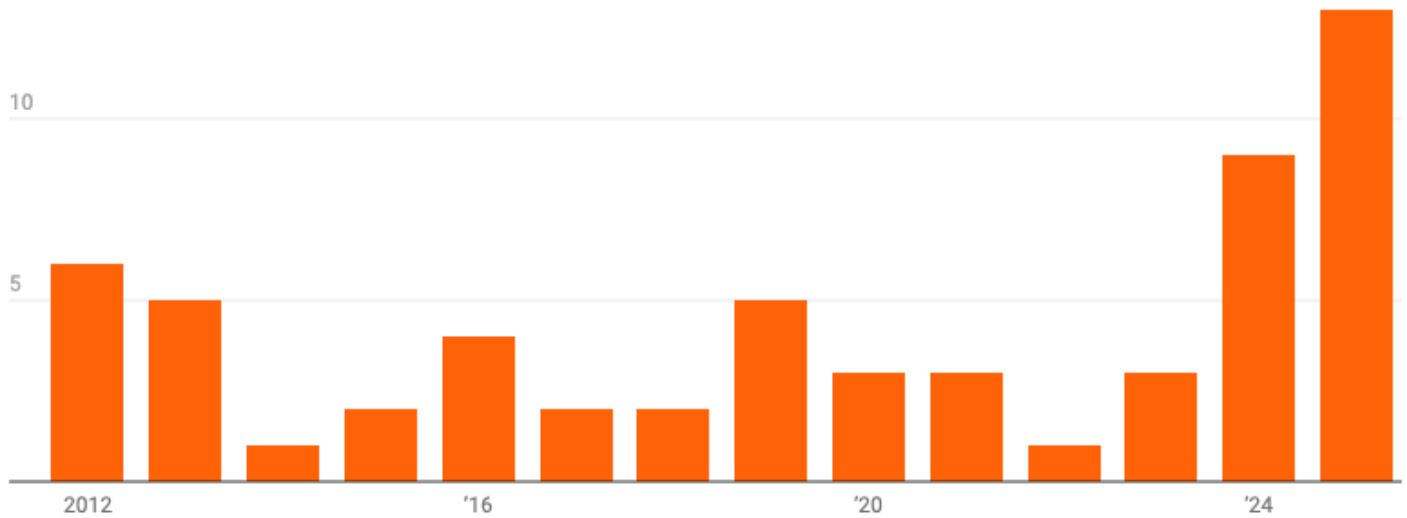


Chart: Justin Fenton/The Banner • Source: Maryland Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services

A paradox not lost on many observers is that in 2024 Maryland lawmakers created a mechanism that was supposed to expose and investigate trends such as this: a correctional ombudsman's office. Remarkably, reporters Justin Fenton, Ben Conarck and Dylan Segelbaum found this new office unresponsive in what is arguably a crisis within the state's adult prisons.

"The current ombudsman, Yvonne Briley-Wilson, did not respond to an interview request," they wrote.<sup>6</sup>

It is not only concerning that very little public information is available regarding the state's internal investigations or oversight of this crisis in our adult facilities, but the gentle handling and deference the media is giving to Secretary Scruggs is perplexing. The lack of media outrage to the serious issue of in-custody deaths in Maryland's adult prisons stands in striking contrast to the intense scrutiny of leadership at the Department of Juvenile Services for facility issues far less severe. Meanwhile, the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services is facing multiple investigations regarding in-custody deaths, including an investigation of criminal misconduct by over two dozen staff at one facility, and numerous calls from union leaders for safer staffing levels.<sup>7</sup>

And ICYMI, [find the May Views on the News here!](#)

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# In The News

## Featured in This Issue's Views on the News

1. [States split on whether juvenile justice should prioritize punishment or rehabilitation](#), by Amanda Watford, Maryland Matters, July 19, 2026.
2. [Baltimore residents call for youth diversion, disability support to sustain crime drop](#), by Chevall Pryce, Baltimore Sun, July 14, 2026.
3. [Residents confront Baltimore County leaders over public safety as officials point to falling crime](#), by Maggie Trovato, Baltimore Sun, June 30, 2026.
4. [Juvenile justice, roadway safety are major concerns at Baltimore County town hall](#), Maggie Trovato, Baltimore Sun, July 22, 2026.
5. [Who is capable of evil? Stop lowering the age of criminal responsibility](#), The Economist, July 9, 2026.
6. [Maryland prisons rank among nation's worst for killings](#), by Justin Fenton, Ben Conarck, and Dylan Segelbaum, Baltimore Banner, July 22, 2026.
7. [Maryland investigating 'potential criminal misconduct' at Hagerstown prison](#), by Todd Karpovich and Ruben Castaneda, Baltimore Sun, July 15, 2026.

## General

- [The Myth that Youth Crime Is Out of Control](#), by Olivia Naugle, Governing, July 24, 2026.
- [Betsy Fox Tolentino outlines changes to Maryland's youth justice system](#), WBAL Radio, July 8, 2026.
- [Del. Scott Phillips talks Baltimore crime and youth justice reforms discussed](#), WBAL Radio, June 22, 2026
- [Youth Charging Reform Act 'ensures that hundreds of Maryland youth are directed toward support and services within the juvenile system'](#), by Emma Akpan, Baltimore Beat, June 16, 2026.
- [Summertime youth curfew takes effect in Laurel](#), by Kristin Danley-Greiner, Patch, June 11, 2026.
- [Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall once advocated for the Cheltenham boys](#), by Aline Behar Kado, The Sentinel, June 3, 2026.
- [Safe Streets Baltimore program associated with reduced youth gun violence, study says](#), by Joseph McHugh, Medical Xpress, June 2, 2026.
- [Bates, Tolentino debate if Maryland is ready for youth justice overhaul](#), by Maggie Trovato, Baltimore Sun, June 1, 2026.
- [Gov. Moore signs Youth Charging Reform Act into Maryland law](#), by Sarah Petrowich, WYPR, May 26, 2026.
- [Baltimore City unveils summer youth engagement strategy, curfews to deter juvenile crime](#), by Adam Thompson, CBS News, May 13, 2026.
- [Mayor Brandon Scott discusses how Baltimore is trying to cut down youth crime](#), by Adam Thompson, CBS News, May 11, 2026.
- [Cheltenham inmate described violent abuse, confinement](#), by Isabella Carrero-Baptista, Maryland Matters, May 11, 2026.
- [Death count at Cheltenham boys' center was nine times that of white facility](#), by Tiasia Saunders and Ela Jalil, Maryland Matters, May 9, 2026.

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