



Welcome to the May/June 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

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**](#)

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?

Although crime has dropped by historic amounts and officials repeatedly concede only a small number of youths continue to offend, the media still present young people—especially those who are Black, low income, and living in under-resourced communities—as a public safety problem in search of a solution. Two recent editorials in the Baltimore Sun, for example, rushed to blame Maryland youths for problems that are clearly the result of choices made by adults. Ignoring the vast majority of kids who go to school, pursue hobbies, and engage normally with family and friends, Sun editorial writers seem determined to blame young people born since 2009 for the sorry condition of contemporary American society.

In a May 19 opinion piece titled “America must confront the growing crisis among young people,” the Sun’s editorial board uses a deadly attack by three teens on a Southern California mosque to paint a dystopian picture of youth here in Maryland.

“America is witnessing a dangerous generation of disconnected young people, increasingly detached from the value of human life itself. We’re no strangers to this phenomenon in Baltimore....”

The authors acknowledge that “[t]oo many young people in Baltimore grow up in environments where dysfunction becomes normalized.” But instead of calling for action by adults to address these challenges—for example, by addressing the poverty that creates conditions in which trauma, drugs, broken families, and hopelessness thrive—the Sun’s editors place the burden on the children themselves. “Young people must understand clearly that violence destroys not only victims, but entire families and communities,” they write, as if a bit of education and a firm hand could fix problems that are structural and nationwide.

In a May 25 opinion piece titled “Maryland makes a gamble on public safety with charging reform”, the editorial board makes a similar reflexive error regarding the Youth Charging Reform Act, which Governor Wes Moore signed late last month. That bill, now law, brought Maryland into alignment with most other states by reducing the number of offenses that require youth to be placed in the adult criminal justice system without prior judicial review and having prosecutors petition a judge when they want a specific case transferred into the adult system.

The editorial repeats the allegation from some states attorneys that the juvenile justice system is unprepared to handle an influx of new cases resulting from the change—even though, as Department of Juvenile Services Commissioner Betsy Fox-Tolentino has repeatedly stated, most autocharged youth are already being placed in DJS custody while petitions to transfer the cases to the youth justice system are being decided. The editorial also repeats, without due skepticism, prosecutors’ lament that moving cases from juvenile to adult court under the new law will be “nearly impossible to accomplish at scale.” Reining in the number of kids charged as adults is the whole point of the legislation, which is

premised on research showing that charging kids as adults is almost always bad for them and for public safety.

Once again, the Sun editorial writers would have young people pay the price for the failures of adults. Were the prosecutors' allegations justified, the answer would not be to increase penalties for young people. It would be to hold adults accountable for building a system that is fully equipped to serve justice, safety, and youth's rehabilitative needs, rather than the convenience of a small group of actors working within that system.

Sadly, when adults can't get their own house in order, the media seems too often content to have kids pay the price.

To ensure you receive the latest Views, [follow us on Substack!](#)

In The News

- [Youth Charging Reform Act 'ensures that hundreds of Maryland youth are directed toward support and services within the juvenile system'](#), by Emma Akpan, 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.

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

c/o Progress Now Education
614 Seymour Ave
Lansing, MI 48933