

October 23, 2023

AN OPEN TO LETTER TO MARYLAND HOUSE JUDICIARY ON YOUTH VIOLENCE BRIEFINGS

Dear Chair Clippinger and members of the Maryland House Judiciary Committee,

We hope this message finds you well. Members of the [Maryland Violence Prevention Coalition](#) closely followed the September 13 briefing on Youth Violence with great interest, as it touched upon numerous issues that our diverse membership deals with on a daily basis.

We are aware of upcoming briefings, including one on November 8, to continue this conversation. While acknowledging that these points might be familiar and part of your plans, we need to emphasize the **importance of including a wider range of stakeholders in future briefings**. The entities that participated in the initial briefing play crucial roles in addressing youth-related issues. However, addressing the challenges faced by our youth requires a more comprehensive approach, one that encompasses the full spectrum of factors leading young individuals into government systems.

We urge you to cast a wider net as you engage in these conversations and that you consider including the following:

- People with **lived experiences** in the communities that are in crisis,
- **Formerly detained** youth and/or adults who were previously tried and incarcerated as youth,
- Representatives from **community-based violence intervention and prevention groups**,
- Individuals who engage with youth and/or their families **prior to any justice-related interventions**, such as school officials, hospital-based VIPP workers, poverty alleviation initiatives, and victim services organizations.

In order to truly problem-solve around the issue of public safety, we must **widen the standard definition of which entities contribute to public safety** beyond law enforcement, Department of Juvenile Services, and detention facilities for young people. Returning to decades-old tropes about “law and order” and the need to “get tough on crime” will inevitably rekindle the devastating impacts of racialized mass incarceration on communities of color. Maryland holds the dubious distinction of having the highest rate in the country for emerging adults who have served 10 or more years in prison, with nearly [eight in 10](#) of them being black. To rectify this,

vital sectors essential to genuine public safety must be included in these discussions, steering clear of past pitfalls.

Our youth are unequivocally expressing their distress. This crisis is a consequence of societal neglect. To build an equal nation, we must address underlying issues. MVPC is ready and willing to assist in any way possible, including providing recommendations for entities aligned with the suggestions mentioned above. We appreciate your time and effort in bringing this critical topic to the forefront of discussion and exploration.

Thank you for your dedication to this important cause.

Sincerely,
Maryland Violence Prevention Coalition