

J.B. JENNINGS
Legislative District 7
Baltimore and Harford Counties

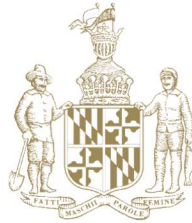
Budget and Taxation Committee

Subcommittees

Capital Budget

Health and Human Services

Legislative Policy Committee



The Senate of Maryland
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

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141 N. Main Street, Suite K
Bel Air, Maryland 21014

June 11, 2025

Sent electronically

Betsy Fox Tolentino
Department of Juvenile Services
217 East Redwood Street
Baltimore, Maryland 21202

Re: Continued Engagement between Senator Jennings & DJS

Dear Acting Secretary Tolentino,

Congratulations on your appointment as Acting Secretary of the Department of Juvenile Services (DJS). I am grateful for a change in DJS leadership during this critical time.

As the State Senator representing Legislative District 7, encompassing parts of Harford and Baltimore Counties, I am reaching out to share several pressing concerns regarding juvenile services and rising criminal activity that continue to affect my district, and many others across the state.

In May, I began discussions with the former secretary, Vincent Schiraldi, concerning the safety and well-being of staff at juvenile detention centers. He kindly offered my team and me the opportunity to tour the Charles H. Hickey, Jr. School, and he also facilitated a connection with the Harford County Detention Center. A tour is currently scheduled for July. I am grateful for his willingness to bring this trip into fruition for my team and look forward to getting an in-person understanding of the needs of the facilities.

For your reference to the questions asked and answered, I have included our previous correspondence on this matter. I appreciate the pace at which he was able to provide these answers and his openness with me, regardless of our differences. Should you feel prepared to provide your individualized responses to these questions, please email your thoughts to jb.jennings@senate.state.md.us. Additionally, I have outstanding concerns in response to current systems in place:

1. In the letter from Mr. Schiraldi, he mentioned that all incidents are tracked and reviewed by leadership to spot trends and facilities are independently monitored by the Juvenile Justice Monitoring Unit, which issues quarterly reports. Are there trends that occurred prior to staff assaults in May? Additionally, what are the trends throughout the state?
2. Charles Hickey appears to be severely understaffed, with an acting superintendent, a vacancy for assistant superintendent as of June 10, 2025 according to their website, and several educational gaps according to the fourth quarter report. ([JJMU Q4 2024 Report](#))


[from MD Attorney General](#)) What does your office plan to do to meet the staffing requirements at Hickey?

3. According to the JJMU report from March 2025, DJS responded with: *“Additional efforts towards cultivating a safe and supportive environment include frequent meetings with youth, line-staff and middle managers, holding focus groups with staff and seeking to implement their ideas on programming, interventions and routine practices that impact their work.”* Are you able to work with senior staff members within DJS to provide dates and corresponding data or interventions that meet the needs detailed on page 57/72?
[JJMU Q4 2024 Report from MD Attorney General](#)

Additionally, I would like to bring to your attention the serious reservations expressed by Senate Republicans regarding Secretary Schiraldi's tenure. Chief among our concerns were his lack of decisive action on repeat juvenile offenders, insufficient pathways for effective rehabilitation of youth in custody, and deeply troubling reports from certain detention centers that demand immediate attention to support staff and the well-being of everyone in the center.

I welcome the opportunity to work collaboratively with your office to improve outcomes for both the youth in the system and the communities impacted by their behavior. I would appreciate the chance to speak with you further about these issues and hear your vision for the department moving forward. Please reach out to my office to schedule a meeting or phone call.

Best Regards,

J.B. Sen. 
Senator J.B. Jennings

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☐ *District Office*
141 N. Main Street, Suite K
Bel Air, Maryland 21014

May 30, 2025

Sent via Electronic Mail

Secretary Vincent Schiraldi
Department of Juvenile Services
217 East Redwood Street
Baltimore, MD 21202

Re: Youth Detention Centers

Dear Secretary Schiraldi,

I'm extremely concerned regarding the recent reports of escalating violence within Maryland's juvenile detention facilities, particularly those incidents that have come to light at Green Ridge Youth Center, where half of the staff allegedly experienced injuries at the hands of juvenile criminals. These developments are disturbing, bringing into question the safety of the staff and youth as well as the efficacy of the current methods for rehabilitation.

As the State Senator for Legislative District 7, I am committed to ensuring that our juvenile services system holds youth accountable for their actions while also providing a path to rehabilitation. Accountability must be a foundational element of any system designed to protect public safety and foster personal responsibility. In light of recent reports detailing juvenile criminal assaults and growing safety concerns, I am seeking clarity on the specific steps the Department is taking to enforce consequences, prevent repeat offenses, and restore order within our facilities.

Specifically, I would appreciate your response to the following questions:


1. What immediate and long-term strategies are being implemented to mitigate juvenile crime in Maryland and ensure young people know that it is not acceptable to break the laws in place?
2. What protocol is in place when individuals in custody violently assault the staff at the juvenile detention facilities?
3. What supports, such as staffing increases, staff training, or mental health services, have been or will be introduced to prevent further incidents? What supports are needed to maintain the safety of the staff and youth?
4. Is there a statewide plan or task force addressing facility safety and youth behavioral health as part of a comprehensive violence prevention strategy?

Ensuring the safety of both staff and youth within our facilities must remain a central priority. Equally important is holding young offenders accountable for their actions in a manner that promotes real rehabilitation. Without accountability, we risk undermining both public trust and the potential for meaningful change in these youths' lives. I believe transparency and collaboration are essential to restoring confidence in our juvenile services

Secretary Vincent Schiradli
May 30, 2025
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system, and I welcome any opportunity to work with your department to understand the scope of the challenges and the solutions being implemented. At the end of the day, communities need to feel safe, and these young people need to understand the consequences of their actions while being given a path forward. Thank you for your attention to this critical matter. I look forward to your response and to continuing a dialogue that supports a safer and more effective juvenile justice system in Maryland.

Best Regards,

J.B. Sen. 
Senator J.B. Jennings

June 2, 2025

The Honorable J.B. Jennings
Maryland State Senate
Miller Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Senator Jennings,

Thank you for your letter regarding recent reports of violence in Maryland's juvenile detention facilities, particularly at Green Ridge Youth Center. I share your deep concern for the safety of both staff and youth and appreciate your continued advocacy for public safety and meaningful rehabilitation in our juvenile justice system.

For background, the Department of Juvenile Services (DJS) operates two types of facilities: detention centers and committed treatment centers. Detention centers house youth while they await adjudication—the juvenile system's equivalent of a trial in the adult system. Committed treatment centers, such as Green Ridge Youth Center, serve youth who have been adjudicated and are receiving treatment and rehabilitative services. For example, Charles H. Hickey School, located in your district, is a detention center, while Green Ridge is a committed facility. These settings differ in the populations they serve and the services they provide.

Please find below responses to each of your inquiries, as well as additional context on the Department of Juvenile Services' (DJS) ongoing efforts:

1. Immediate and long-term strategies to mitigate juvenile crime:

DJS is taking several immediate and long-term steps to mitigate juvenile crime. First, DJS is expanding Thrive into a statewide program. We are continuing our relationships with We Our Us in Baltimore City and the Credible Messenger Mentoring Movement in Prince George's County. New providers include Kingdom Kare in Anne Arundel County, Tendea Family in Baltimore County, and Jacob's Ladder in Prince George's County.

Five more programs are applying for rates to serve youth in Baltimore City, Baltimore County, Montgomery County, and the Eastern Shore. Once they have a rate, DJS will secure contracts with local providers. The Thrive model will also be adapted to support youth on probation who are experiencing significant challenges.

DJS launched the Thrive Academy in 2023 in response to the high number of youth on DJS caseloads who were victims or perpetrators of gun crime. The program began in four jurisdictions—Anne Arundel County, Baltimore City, Baltimore County, and Prince George's County—which together accounted for 82% of youth victims of gun violence in FY23.

Thrive is an intensive, community-based program in which each youth participant is paired with both a specialized DJS case manager and a life coach who shares lived experiences similar to those of the youth they serve. The program provides participants with a personalized "suitcase of supports" tailored to their needs. Services include subsidized employment, assistance with college or vocational training, voluntary relocation support, and trauma-informed therapy.

The Thrive Academy has served 172 youth from September of 2023 to April of 2025. Of those, only 3% of Thrive youth have been gun violence victims, none have been homicide victims, and 4 out of 5 have not been arrested for a gun-related offense.

When I started, there were virtually no workforce options for youth, despite that being the number one request of our youth and research showing that employment helps reduce recidivism. DJS partnered with local Workforce Development Boards to secure dedicated training and employment opportunities for youth. Last summer, DJS had 128 summer employment slots available, providing critical early work experience.

In July 2023 DJS launched our Comprehensive Treatment Model (CTM) with the assistance of Georgetown University and the Pew Charitable Trusts. Under the CTM, we now provide Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) to all youth in our residential programs, such as Green Ridge. DBT has been found to reduce recidivism among delinquent youth in numerous high quality studies.

Finally, with funding from the federal Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, DJS is conducting a county-by-county service continuum needs assessment to evaluate the availability and gaps in local programming. This collaborative process includes input from judges, magistrates, state's attorneys, public defenders, youth, and families. Our FY26 budget includes additional funding to expand and strengthen needed services. Every jurisdiction is different, and this assessment allows us to identify and invest in what's working while addressing local service gaps.

2. Protocols for youth assaults on staff:

All incidents of violence are taken seriously and are investigated by the DJS Office of the Inspector General. When appropriate, matters are referred to law enforcement. When there is an assault in the facility, the DJS Executive Director and leadership team review the incident with staff to determine whether law enforcement involvement is warranted. Additionally, staff have the authority to contact law enforcement at the time of the incident if immediate intervention is needed. Youth who exhibit aggressive behavior face appropriate consequences, which may include the loss of privileges, programmatic expulsion and return to detention and, in some cases, legal charges. DJS places a strong emphasis on identifying the root causes of behavior through behavioral health evaluations and targeted interventions such as DBT and de-escalation strategies.

All incidents are tracked, reviewed, and analyzed at the executive level to identify trends and appropriate responses. DJS is also independently monitored by the Juvenile Justice Monitoring Unit (JJMU), which publishes quarterly public reports on each facility.

3. Supports introduced or needed to maintain safety:

DJS is deeply committed to its frontline staff, who are responsible for the day-to-day operations at the facilities and are the key components to ensuring that youth receive treatment, support, and accountability. Their work supports youth in making different decisions when they return to the community. To that end, since my arrival at DJS, we worked to significantly reduce front-line facility vacancy rates—from 17.38% in January 2023 to 5.09% in May 2025.



Lower vacancies reduce overtime, increase staffing consistency, and foster a calmer, more stable environment for youth and staff. In addition, DJS has incorporated evidence-based practices, including Safe Crisis Management (SCM) training, equipping staff with tools focused on de-escalation and youth skill development. Additionally, to help reduce idle time, facility staff partnered with the Juvenile Services Education Program to provide after-school programs for youth. These programs offer youth an opportunity to learn new skills and have exposure to new experiences. Additionally, when youth are positively occupied, they are much less likely to be involved in incidents.

4. Statewide plan/task force on facility safety and youth behavioral health:

During the 2024 legislative session, the General Assembly passed HB 814, which established the Commission on Juvenile Justice Reform and Emerging Best Practices under the Governor's Office of Crime Prevention and Policy. The Commission comprises a diverse range of stakeholders, including frontline staff, mental health professionals, state's attorneys, law enforcement personnel, and community organizations. One of its workgroups is focused on behavioral health needs and facility safety. The Commission's first report is due in October 2025.

DJS remains committed to continuous improvement across all of its residential programs. Our internal Innovations Team is working to implement systemic reforms, expand trauma-informed practices, and elevate youth voice. These efforts are guided by collaboration with both staff and youth, and are aimed at building sustainable, supportive, and safe environments—particularly at facilities like Green Ridge.

I believe strongly that safety and rehabilitation are not mutually exclusive. When we invest in well-trained staff, trauma-informed practices, and strong community-based supports, we not only make facilities safer, we also build better outcomes for the young people in our care.

I welcome the opportunity to speak with you further or to arrange a facility visit. Thank you again for your commitment to public safety and to a more effective juvenile justice system.

Sincerely,



Vincent Schiraldi
Secretary
Maryland Department of Juvenile Services