



STATE OF MARYLAND
OFFICE OF THE CORRECTIONAL OMBUDSMAN
JUVENILE JUSTICE MONITORING UNIT

**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF MAINE HOUSE BILL 1893:
AN ACT TO ESTABLISH AN INDEPENDENT OFFICE OF THE CHILD ADVOCATE**

Joint Health and Human Services Committee
May 9, 2025

**Submitted by Marvin Stone, Senior Monitor, Maryland Office of the
Correctional Ombudsman (OCO) Juvenile Justice Monitoring Unit (JJMU)**

The Maryland Office of the Correctional Ombudsman (OCO) and the Juvenile Justice Monitoring Unit (JJMU) supports HB 1893 which will improve safety and services for children and youth involved with the child welfare and juvenile justice systems in Maine. The JJMU was established as an independent state agency, emerged in the wake of systemic abuses within Maryland's juvenile justice system. Currently under the Maryland Office of the Correctional Ombudsman, the JJMU's mission is to safeguard young people in custody by ensuring they receive the treatment and services they need to thrive. Unit monitors perform unannounced visits to the Maryland Department of Juvenile Services' (DJS') operated detention and placement facilities, working to protect the rights of young people and ensure they are treated with dignity and respect. Monitors have full access to DJS' critical incident and case management databases, enabling the independent assessment of concerns and the ability to advocate for improvements. Over the years, JJMU's oversight has been a powerful tool for change, increasing both transparency and accountability as well as improving the conditions and services available to vulnerable youth. The unit issues publicly available reports on facility conditions and services, and the reports include recommendations aligned with best practices on behalf of young people in custody.

Our work in Maryland has proven that external oversight is critical to preventing abuse and ensuring that young people in the juvenile justice system receive appropriate care. We have worked constructively with stakeholders across systems in the successful pursuit of our mission. The proposed Independent Office of the Child Advocate can achieve similar success through collaboration with all those involved with and impacted by child-serving agencies.

Public reporting requirements within the bill will keep Maine citizens and stakeholder groups aware of systemic issues and proposed solutions. Public awareness is a vital component in the effort to drive effective reforms that are responsive to the needs of children, families and local communities.

The Office of the Child Advocate will play a crucial role in addressing potentially serious systemic shortcomings before they become widespread, chronic issues. The passage of HB 1893 will bring transparency, accountability, and oversight to Maine's child-serving agencies to ensure the safety, health, mental health and general physical and emotional well-being of children and young people in the state.

Through independent, objective reporting and monitoring, the state will be better equipped to deliver the services vulnerable children need to overcome adversity and reach their full potential.

For all the reasons just given, the OCO/JJMU strongly supports this bill and respectfully urges the committee to give HB 1893 a favorable report.