Advocates for Children and Youth believes that Maryland’s children are the greatest gift it can give to the future. For this reason, our mission is to build a strong Maryland by advancing policies and programs to ensure children of every race, ethnicity, and place of birth achieve their full potential.

We gather and analyze data to understand the scope of inequities that our children and youth face. We are continuously invited into communities to get a proximate view by folks who experience inequities and negative policy outcomes the most. Oftentimes, these inequities have far reaching effects as they are caused by issues that interconnect and intersect. Therefore, our advocacy will reflect this reality and allow us to effectively address these issues as we introduce and support policies that ensure that every young person in the State has equitable access to resources and opportunities they need to thrive. Hence our theme, Equity for All Kids.

**WHY ADVOCATES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH MATTERS:**

We are the only statewide child advocacy organization that works to effectively address multiple interconnecting and intersecting issues through a racial equity lens. We will continue to do so in Maryland's 2020 General Assembly as we focus on legislation that promotes the following:

- **FAIR, UNBIASED TREATMENT**
  
  We will push for equitable treatment of all children and provide them with an opportunity to rebound.

- **ACADEMICALLY PREPARED YOUTH**
  
  We will advocate to ensure that all young people get the resources, education and supports they need to thrive.

- **POSITIVE LIFE EXPERIENCES**
  
  We will advocate for keeping childhood a positive experience as we address trauma and the fulfillment of the basic needs in life.

- **HEALTHY KIDS, FAMILIES, COMMUNITIES**
  
  We will push for policy and programs that support healthy and safe living, learning and working environments in all communities.
Exercising Our Civil Rights: Having Legal Representation During Interrogation

Youth of all races commit offenses at roughly the same rates however, African American and Latinx, youth are arrested and detained at much higher rates than all other racial groups, and therefore are at particularly high risk of facing police interrogations and coercion.

**Impact:** Every day in Maryland, children entangled in the criminal justice system are questioned without a parent or attorney present. As a result, they face criminal charges, prosecution, and incarceration without the basic due process rights as adults. This practice is particularly dire for Black and Brown children, who are overpoliced.

**Need for legislation:** A law is needed to protect due process rights for children.

**What the legislation will do:** This law will codify the rights of children.

Giving Youth A Chance to Get it Right—Informal Adjustment

This bill gives judges the flexibility to determine the best course of corrective and rehabilitative action to help youth rebound after an offense. It extends the informal adjustment process from solely an intake practice to the judiciary realm and allows all parties including the Judge, Prosecutor, and Defense Attorney to request an informal adjustment at trial when more facts of the case are available which diverts young people from the system.

**Contact:** Ashley DeVaughn at adevaughn@acy.org or 410-547-9200 ext. 3007
Keeping Private Information Private: Shielding Personal Information of Minors

Youth encountering the adult justice system—specifically those youth cases that are sent back to the juvenile system have their personal information publicly available although they are minors. This unnecessary exposure of personal information threatens their ability to rebound and have a fresh start.

**Impact:** In Maryland, youth 14- to 17-years old can be automatically charged as adults for one of 33 offenses. Across the state of Maryland, *57 percent of youth charged as adults have their cases transferred to the juvenile system.* In Baltimore, this figure is *67 percent.* During the period in which a transfer hearing is pending, all information about the young person is publicly available.

**Need for legislation:** Media outlets can publish all the youth’s personal identifying information prior to the transfer hearing, including name, photograph/mug shot, physical address, and date of birth. Even if a young person is transferred to the juvenile system following media exposure, and even if his/her adult record is expunged, media coverage, especially on the internet, will never be erased.

**What the legislation will do:** This legislation will prevent prejudicial treatment caused by media exposure and increase the opportunity for a fair transfer hearing.

Ending the Practice of Fines, Fees and Costs

Juvenile courts charge young people and their families fines, fees, costs, and restitution without regard to children’s inability to pay. In juvenile courts, the consequences of such practices are detrimental as they are exacerbated by children’s financial dependence.

**Impact:** Children may feel pressure to waive their right to counsel if their legal representation imposes a financial burden on their families; and *children and their families are pulled deeper into the court system for longer periods of time, for reasons unrelated to public safety.* Further, when access to justice is conditioned on a person’s ability to pay fines, fees, and other costs to the courts, the disparities of class, race, and ethnicity are magnified.

**Need for legislation:** In Maryland, children can be kept under probationary supervision until fines and fees are paid making it difficult to get out of the youth justice system.

**What the legislation will do:** This legislation will stop the imposition of fines and fees on youth and families as well as end incarceration or detainment of youth for non-payment of fees, fines, or financial obligations when the failure to pay stems from poverty, lack of income, or an inability to pay.

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Ending the School-to-Prison Pipeline

In the 2018-2019 school year, Black students were the ONLY racial group to be disproportionately suspended and expelled from Maryland’s public schools. This holds true in 23 of Maryland’s 24 jurisdictions. Students with educational disabilities were suspended and expelled from school at twice their percentage of enrollment. Students who identify as LGBTQ were also subject to harsher punishment.

Impact: Students cannot learn, grow, and thrive in school if they are excluded from being in school at all. Repeated exclusion of specific groups of students from school over what are typically subjective measures of student behavior (38% disruption/disrespect) or developmentally expected (46% fighting), has consistently been shown to increase a young person’s likelihood of failing to complete high school, interacting with the youth justice system, and overall yields poor life outcomes.

Need for legislation: Mitigating the impact of subjective and punitive discipline on students of color, students with disabilities, and students who identify as LGBTQ.

Next Steps: Advocates for Children and Youth will support reforms that address this issue.

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Ending Implicit Bias in Healthcare: Training Medical Practitioners

There are significant racial disparities in birth outcomes for Black women and babies. Black women in Maryland are 3-4 times more likely to die after childbirth than white women and the infant mortality rate for Black babies is almost three times higher than for White babies. These racial disparities are largely due to the epigenetic impact of racism and the differential treatment Black individuals experience with medical professionals.

Impact: Eliminating the sub-par treatment Black women receive by medical professionals will go a long way towards eliminating the negative outcomes these women experience throughout pregnancy and child birth.

Need for legislation: Medical providers need to increase their awareness of any implicit racial bias and ensure they are responding to Black patients the same way they respond to White patients to eliminate the disparities in care Black people receive by the medical field.

What the legislation will do: This law will require mandatory implicit bias training for medical professionals to improve birth outcomes for Black women and lower the racial disparities.

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