MARYLAND JUSTICE PARTNERSHIP

An Initiative of the Maryland Office of the Public Defender

From the Director of Systemic Reform



There is a statistic that has stayed with me since I first read it. Maryland incarcerates Black people at a higher rate than any other state in the country. Black Marylanders make up about 30% of the population and 71% of the incarcerated population. That is not a data point you can set aside — it is a condition that touches families, shapes neighborhoods, and has persisted despite decades of well-meaning policy conversations. The Maryland Justice Partnership aims to reform the state's criminal legal system, implementing 18 recommendations from the Maryland Equitable Justice Collaborative through six hubs: Community Safety and Crisis Response, Pretrial Justice and Fair Sentencing, Behavioral Health Justice, Sentencing and Parole Reform, Community Reintegration and Stability, and Youth Justice and Educational Equity.

In Q1 2026, we held inaugural meetings for all six hubs, made them available on YouTube, and engaged over 100 partner organizations across Maryland. We secured academic partners from Morgan State University, Bowie State University, and Coppin State University. Some of this was challenging — launching something new within government requires navigating processes not designed for speed. What kept things moving was the people: advocates, agency partners, and community members who showed up prepared and dedicated. Looking ahead, we are launching our website, planning community events, and developing hub priorities. Hub meeting recordings are available on our YouTube channel. To join our mailing list or participate, contact us at Contact.MJP@maryland.gov.

In gratitude,
Kirsten Gettys Downs
Director of Systemic Reform
Maryland Office of the Public Defender
Kirsten.Downs@maryland.gov | 410-205-6672

MJP COORDINATING TEAM

- ***Kendra Lindsey***
- ***Tamira Carr***
- ***Brianna Nave***
- ***Fellow: Jesse Kelly***
- ***Fellow: Ernandie Innocent***



MARYLAND JUSTICE PARTNERSHIP LAUNCHES IN JANUARY



On January 12, 2026, The Maryland Office of the Public Defender announced the new partnership, the Maryland Justice Partnership (MJP). MJP is a coordinated, statewide

On January 12, 2026, the Maryland Office of the Public Defender announced the Maryland Justice Partnership (MJP) — a coordinated, statewide effort to move Maryland from recommendations to implementation. It brings together agency leaders, community partners, academics, and individuals with lived experience to design and execute practical reforms that improve fairness, effectiveness, and public safety statewide. The MJP is a forward-looking implementation framework, not a task force or study group. Its purpose is to support targeted action, measurable progress, and transparent reporting.

Why Does the Work of the MJP Matter?

Maryland has the highest racial incarceration disparity in the nation. Black people make up 30% of Maryland's population — and 71% of its prison population, 71% of its parole population, and 59% of its jail population. Eighty-two percent of people serving life sentences in Maryland are Black. This is not a single policy failure.

It is a system-wide pattern: Black drivers are stopped at disproportionate rates and nearly three times more likely to have force used against them during non-safety stops; Black defendants receive bail amounts 45% higher than comparable charges; Black students make up a third of the school population but more than half of school-based arrests; and Black youth are charged as adults at seven times the rate of their peers. Maryland spends $60,360 per year, per person, to maintain a cycle with a 31.55% recidivism rate. Racial disparity in Maryland's criminal legal system is structural, measurable — and it will not change without the sustained, accountable work the MJP was built to do.

Read the WYPR article

Community Safety & Crisis Response	Pretrial Justice & Fair Sentencing	Behavioral Health Justice
Sentencing & Parole Reform	Community Reintegration & Stability	Youth Justice & Educational Equity

How the MJP Is Structured With Six Implementation Hubs

Each Hub focuses on a core justice system area and advances a subset of the 18 statewide recommendations. Hubs are co-led by a state agency and a community partner, supported by an academic evaluator, and coordinated by the Maryland Office of the Public Defender (MOPD).

THE MARYLAND OFFICE OF THE PUBLIC DEFENDER – HUB ADVISORS

- Elizabeth Hilliard

Director of Government Relations

- Erin Seagers

Juvenile Supervising Attorney

- Krystal Williams

Assistant Public Defender

- Robin Salter

Regional Director of Youth Defense

- Shannice Anderson-Kimpson

Community Engagement Coordinator

- Terri Collins Green

Director of the Social Work Division

- Christina Hawkins

Statewide Peer Support Manager

- Tia Holmes

Assistant Public Defender

- Sanjeev Varghese

Deputy Chief of the Mental Health Division

- Sean Mukherjee

District Public Defender, Montgomery County

- Donny Umberger

Youth Reentry Peer Recovery Specialist

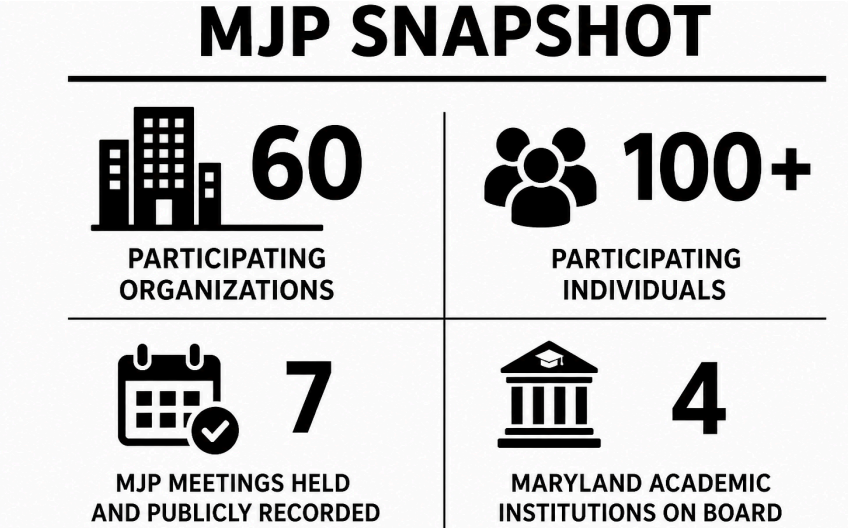
Legislative Wins: Two MEJC Recommendations Become Law

The 2026 session of the Maryland General Assembly delivered two landmark victories. Senate Bill 822 advances MEJC Recommendation #10 — requiring the Maryland Parole Commission to provide access to the materials and justifications used in parole determinations. Senate Bill 323, the Youth Charging Reform Act, advances MEJC Recommendation #17, restricting the automatic transfer of youth to adult court after fifteen years of advocacy. The MJP's Sentencing and Parole Reform Hub and Youth Justice and Educational Equity Hub will support monitoring and implementation of both laws.

Maryland Justice Partnership Receives Inaugural Support from Public Welfare Foundation

We are pleased to announce that the Maryland Justice Partnership (MJP) has received its first grant from Public Welfare Foundation (PWF), a national funder committed to advancing criminal justice reform and racial equity. This investment will support MJP's work to implement the 18 recommendations of the Maryland Equitable Justice Collaborative, spanning pretrial reform, sentencing, behavioral health, and reentry, through six cross-sector Implementation Hubs co-led by state agencies and community organizations across Maryland.

PWF's support reflects confidence in MJP's model: a decentralized, community-driven framework that moves reform from planning to practice. We look forward to keeping our supporters informed as the Hubs take shape and our work advances statewide.



FOSTERING RELATIONSHIPS & BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS



Restorative Practices Panel at the MSBA ADR Career Forum

Erin Seagears, Supervising Attorney (MOPD), represented the Maryland Justice Partnership at the Maryland State Bar Association ADR Career Forum at Morgan State University, leading a discussion on restorative practices in Baltimore City alongside Baltimore City Public Schools' Office of Student Conduct & Attendance.

MJP Advocates In Annapolis

MJP joined advocates, community leaders, and stakeholders for Overdose Prevention Advocacy Day, led by Lieutenant Governor Aruna Miller, helping elevate conversations around recovery, care, and community-centered solutions that strengthen public health and well-being across Maryland.



Young Adult Resource Fair at CareFirst Mondawmin

In December 2025, MJP participated in CareFirst's inaugural Resource Fair, connecting with community members and local organizations dedicated to advancing wellness, mental health awareness, and access to supportive resources that promote healthier and stronger communities.



Annual CityLit Festival in Baltimore City

In April, Kirsten Gettys Downs, Director of Systemic Reform, moderated *CityLit Festival Presents: When She Walked Through the Door Again*, a powerful conversation centered on women, healing, reclamation, and the realities of returning home after incarceration.



Building Restorative Pathways: Dr. Charles Adams and Bowie State University Join Forces with the Maryland Justice Partnership

Dr. Charles Adams and Bowie State University's Restorative Justice and Practices Institute are partnering with the Maryland Justice Partnership (MJP) to advance youth justice, reintegration, and healing-centered reform in Maryland. Building on prior collaboration through the MEJC, this partnership reflects a shared commitment to reducing racial disparities and connecting justice reform to community-based implementation.

Why This Partnership Matters

Dr. Adams is a Professor of Sociology and Child Studies at Bowie State University and Director of the Prison Education Program and the Restorative Justice and Practices Institute. The Institute expands access to higher education for incarcerated individuals, advances restorative justice practices, and develops reentry pathways. The Prison Education Program serves a committed cohort pursuing a Bachelor of Science in Sociology.

How the Partnership Will Work

In youth justice, Dr. Adams and the Institute will support restorative school discipline, reduce criminalization of student behavior, strengthen diversion pathways, and provide training on bias, trauma, and adolescent development. In reintegration, Bowie State will help MJP design stronger pathways connecting education, housing, employment, behavioral health care, and community support for returning residents. The partnership may also include rapid-response briefs, implementation memos, stakeholder training, and listening sessions.

What MJP Hopes To Achieve

Through this partnership, MJP aims to see fewer young people pushed from classrooms into courtrooms, stronger reentry pathways, and broader use of trauma-informed, restorative responses across Maryland. This partnership represents a chance to deepen the role of restorative justice in statewide reform and connect MJP's goals with education, healing, and community leadership.

SPOTLIGHT: Voices from the Community



Racial Justice NOW! — Building People Power for Black Children and Families

When the Maryland Justice Partnership launched in January 2026, the organizations that showed up first and stayed were the ones that had been doing this work longest. Racial Justice NOW! DMV was among them. Co-founded by Zakiya Sankara-Jabar, a nationally recognized racial justice leader with over a decade of executive experience promoting better outcomes for Black children and families, Racial Justice NOW! operates at the intersection of community organizing, policy advocacy, and grassroots empowerment in the DC, Maryland, and Virginia region.

> *"RJN! partners with and organizes across generations of impacted youth, parents, and communities to build and wield people power at the grassroots to advance human rights by challenging systemic anti-Black racism, the criminalization of Black families, and discriminatory policies in education and beyond."*

That mission aligns closely with the MJP's important work. Co-Founder Zakiya Sankara-Jabar actively contributed to the MEJC's Youth Justice Reform Workgroup, helping to shape the evidence and community insights that laid the groundwork for the MJP's Youth Justice and Educational Equity Hub. One key issue they've passionately supported is also a priority for both the MJP and the Maryland Office of the Public Defender: reducing the automatic charging of youth as adults.

Zakiya Sankara-Jabar and her colleagues have been enthusiastic participants since the beginning, attending multiple hub meetings and bringing the credibility that comes from years of organizing with the families most directly affected by the policies under discussion. Community organizations like Racial Justice NOW! are not observers of the reform process. They are co-authors of it.

Learn more at www.rjndmv.org.

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AN INITIATIVE OF THE MARYLAND OFFICE OF THE PUBLIC DEFENDER











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