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Maryland Public Defender and Baltimore City District Public Defender Denounce Call for Enforcing Youth Curfew

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This past weekend, Baltimore Mayor Brandon Scott announced that we are [“going back to the old days”](#) by enforcing a curfew that will bar children from staying outside after 9pm if 13 or under, or after 10pm if they are 14-16. While making this announcement in response to the shooting of two youths in the Inner Harbor, the Mayor acknowledged that the curfew will not prevent this type of violence.

The Maryland Office of the Public Defender agrees that the curfew decision will not address the underlying causes of violent crime or prevent violence, which rarely occurs during curfew hours. OPD further warns that the increased police contact has the potential to harm Baltimore’s children and families.

“What we have learned since the ‘old days’ is that curfews are unconstitutional, racially biased policing strategies that drive unnecessary and harmful contact between police and Black and brown children,” said Maryland Public Defender Natasha M. Dartigue. “Our children need access to adequate schools, housing, and healthcare, which includes mental health and trauma counseling, not performative acts that give the appearance of public safety. Focusing resources on capturing and punishing children diverts resources from the true solution of investing in positive ways and new opportunities for all children to engage in constructive behaviors in their leisure time.”

Research shows that curfews at best have no impact, and potential cause greater harms. [A 2015 study of Washington D.C.’s youth curfew laws found that gun violence by 150% during the non-curfew hours](#). Other studies suggest that [youth crime and victimization are most likely to occur before and after school](#), when curfew laws are not in effect.

“Connecting children and their families with resources can be better targeted to those who need it, and should not require engagement with law enforcement,” said District Public Defender for Baltimore City Marguerite E. Lanaux. “We have seen countless tragedies involving our youth throughout the city, yet here we are again with a knee jerk response when the location spills out of certain communities and into others. Protecting our youth requires a steady commitment to data driven initiatives, not a reactionary response to tragedy when certain demographics and neighborhoods are involved.”

“As the warm weather is upon us,” Lanaux continued, “we should be looking for opportunities to increase access to positive programming and resources for the City’s young people. We have

seen the devastating effects of isolation as a result of the pandemic. Restricting movement and access to certain areas in the community will only increase the potential for harm and further isolate our youth.”

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