



MARYLAND OFFICE OF THE  
PUBLIC DEFENDER

# 2026 Legislative Priorities

The Maryland Office of the Public Defender (MOPD) carries a constitutional duty unlike any other: to stand beside those who cannot afford an attorney. Most of those we serve are Black and Brown individuals from communities long denied access to quality education, healthcare, economic opportunity, and mental health services—supports that can prevent involvement with the justice system. While MOPD defends all clients, our 2026 legislative agenda focuses on four urgent priorities: **Increased Funding, Child Protection, Family Preservation, and Reducing Unnecessary Police Encounters.**

**FUND  
INDIGENT  
DEFENSE**

A fully resourced public defense system protects client rights, retains skilled defenders, and holds every part of the criminal legal system accountable. Without it, public trust erodes and the system's integrity collapses.

**Maryland's Budget Priorities Must Include Properly Funding MOPD.**

**PROTECT  
CHILDREN**

Charging children as adults disproportionately devastates Black and Brown youth, stripping them of their childhood and futures. Though Black children make up only 31% of the youth population, they account for 81% of those charged as adults.

**Maryland Cannot Continue Harming Children Through Its Charging Process—Reform is Needed Now.**

**PRESERVE  
FAMILIES**

When parents don't know their rights, families are torn apart. In 2022, Black children made up 52.8% of foster placements, though they account for only 30.6% of Maryland's children. That same year, DSS investigated 17,100 cases—and dismissed or disproved 71% of them.

**Maryland Families Must Know Before They Knock.**

**KEEP  
DRIVERS  
SAFE**

Maryland law allows traffic stops for minor, non-safety issues—like a dim license plate light. As a result, Black drivers are stopped more often and searched without warrants at four times the rate of white drivers.

**Maryland Must PASS HB SB0055/HB0081 to Stop Police From Targeting Black Drivers Through Traffic Stops.**

## Scan for More Resources



The Maryland Office of the Public Defender is the largest criminal defense firm in the State. Since 1972, we have been the state's foremost advocates for securing justice, protecting civil rights, and preserving liberty. Our work spans criminal, juvenile, parental defense, and involuntary commitment proceedings.

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