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PUBLIC DEFENDER

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Statement from the Maryland Public Defender Natasha M. Dartigue regarding the change in leadership at the Department of Juvenile Services:

The Office of the Public Defender thanks Vincent Schiraldi for his service to Maryland and for the compassionate, reform-minded leadership he brought to the Department of Juvenile Services (DJS). His work reflected a deep understanding of the true value and totality of Maryland's children.

We also welcome Acting Secretary Betsy Tolentino, an advocate with a longstanding commitment to transformative youth services, and look forward to working with her to continue building a system that prioritizes rehabilitation over punishment. As we move forward and focus on achieving the best outcomes for our youth, DJS must continue to invest in community interventions, expand access to restorative justice, and ensure that every child receives the support and services they need to become productive members of society. Incarcerating young people is never the answer to the challenges our communities face.

To build a system rooted in genuine justice and fairness, we must begin with the unwavering principle: children must be seen, understood, and treated as the developing human beings they are. This recognition carries the responsibility that we honor the boundless potential that lives within every young person, their infinite capacity for transformation, healing, and growth. Our institutions, our laws, our very approach to public safety must be designed to nurture and protect the extraordinary potential of all Maryland youth.