Processes and System Coordination Workgroup Summary

Workgroup Co-Chairs and Members

The Processes and System Coordination Workgroup is co-chaired by Alycia Capozello, Deputy District Public Defender for Baltimore City Office of the Public Defender and Susan Leviton, Professor Emeritus of Law at the University of Maryland School of Law. Members of the Processes and System Coordination Workgroup include: Denise Henderson, Youth Transportation Officer for the Department of Juvenile Services and and President of AFSCME Local 3167; Lacey Davis, Victim Witness Specialist for the Juvenile Justice Unit at Anne Arundel County State's Attorney's Office; Liz Park, Director at Greenbelt CARES; Nate Balis, Director of Juvenile Justice Strategy Group at Annie E. Casey Foundation; Donald L. Baker, Jr., Sheriff of Caroline County; Reuben Alvarez, Youth Member; Will Smith, Senator for District 20; Rafael Lopez, Secretary of the Department of Human Services; Jenny Egan, DJS Designee; Vinny Schiraldi, Secretary of the Department of Juvenile Services; and Lara Weathersbee, Associate Judge for Howard County Circuit Court's 5th Judicial Circuit.

Objectives and Approach

The Processes and System Coordination Workgroup was established to examine the full trajectory of how youth interact with Maryland's legal system, from first contact through case resolution. Its primary focus includes analyzing the mechanics of automatic charging, the timing and discretion involved in judicial waivers, delays in transfer hearings, and the points at which system gaps increase the risk of youth being unnecessarily detained in adult facilities. The group is also critically assessing Maryland's compliance with the federal Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDPA), with particular focus on the "Sight and Sound Separation" and "Jail Removal" mandates. Using a "life-of-a-case" framework, members are mapping youth system touchpoints to understand how structural inefficiencies and policy decisions impact both individual outcomes and systemwide equity.

Meetings and Activities to Date

The group met formally in February, March, April, and May 2025. In its February 21 meeting, members reviewed data from GOCPP's dashboards on youth charged as adults and received a national perspective from The Sentencing Project. Maryland's outsized use of automatic charging was a central concern, especially given that a vast majority of those youth ultimately return to the juvenile system after months of adult detention. This prompted the group to investigate not just the front-end decision-making, but also the long procedural timelines that exacerbate harm.
By March 21, the group had pivoted toward data needs and accountability. Members supported a formal GOCPP request to the Maryland Judiciary for disaggregated, case-level data on youth transfer and case processing. At that meeting, the group also examined several case examples in which youth experienced prolonged detention due to procedural and administrative breakdowns, highlighting the urgent need for better cross-system coordination and real-time data sharing.

At the April 11 meeting, the group met with Jenny Egan with the Maryland Department of Juvenile Services, who tracks the transfer process for young people. This meeting marked a turning point as the Workgroup began to more deeply explore Maryland's federal noncompliance and its potential consequences. Members learned that new federal thresholds, adopted in 2024, revealed Maryland to be the worst-performing state in the nation in terms of "Jail Removal" violations. Youth charged as adults who are often held in adult facilities far beyond the federal six-hour limit are the primary source of these violations. The group began developing a multi-pronged strategy to understand the barriers to timely transfer, judicial discretion, and juvenile placement capacity.

On May 9, the co-chairs convened a follow-up compliance planning meeting with Jenny Krabill, GOCPP's Compliance Monitor. During this session, Krabill detailed the federal funding consequences of Maryland's violations, noting that the state will lose 20% of its formula grant and must now redirect 50% of its remaining funds toward compliance efforts. Members learned that in FY23, Maryland reported 1,268 violations, translating to a compliance rate more than six times worse than the federal maximum threshold. In FY24, that number was projected to exceed 1,600. These violations stem primarily from youth held in adult jails without timely "Interest of Justice" (IOJ) orders, with site-specific problems such as lack of sight-and-sound separation, inconsistent IOJ issuance, and inadequate detention capacity across both juvenile and adult facilities.

The Workgroup explored how systemic barriers, such as the limited authority of bail commissioners, variability in judicial practice, and DJS's restricted intake capacity, compound delays and lead to preventable harm. Members also reflected on how Maryland's legislative failure to reform automatic charging laws has deepened the crisis. Despite multiple attempts since 2021 to pass corrective legislation, no bill has succeeded. The group emphasized that the state's inability to comply with federal law is not just a funding issue but a moral and human rights concern.

Presentations and Resources Reviewed

Across its meetings, the Workgroup reviewed a wide range of materials and expert input. This included GOCPP's statewide dashboards and policy recommendations related to youth transfer, conviction, and sentencing, as well as testimony and analysis from The Sentencing Project on national trends in automatic charging and decarceration. The group also examined internal DJS documents, such as case tracking dashboards and narrative timelines, alongside compliance monitoring data detailing Maryland's violations under the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDPA). Additional background on federal thresholds, interest of justice (IOJ) requirements, and judicial discretion limitations was provided by Jenny Egan and the GOCPP Compliance Office.

Emerging Themes and Preliminary Findings

A core realization for the Workgroup this year has been how the current system prioritizes short-term decision-making - moving youth back and forth between adult and juvenile facilities - at the expense of long-term efficiency, legality, and youth outcomes. The practice of automatically charging youth as adults, only to later return the majority of these cases to the juvenile system, creates a high-stakes bottleneck that is costly, slow, and harmful. Members noted that it is often faster and more resource-efficient to start young people in juvenile facilities, where developmental needs are better met, rather than cycle them through adult jails that are neither designed for rehabilitation nor equipped to comply with federal mandates.

This insight has led the Workgroup to elevate automatic transfer practices and federal noncompliance as two of the most urgent systemic issues under its purview. The frequent failure to meet requirements for "Jail Removal" and "Sight and Sound Separation" has underscored how administrative inefficiencies and outdated legal

defaults continue to drive preventable harm. Youth may spend weeks or months in adult jails, which are spaces not intended for their safety or development, due to procedural delays, staffing shortages, and lack of judicial authority at early hearing stages.

Recognizing that jurisdictional variation and case complexity obscure the scale of this problem, the Workgroup supported a formal data request to the Maryland Judiciary for disaggregated, case-level data. This information will help quantify how many youth experience delayed transfer, how long they are held, and what case outcomes ultimately result. Preliminary reviews suggest that the status quo does not serve youth, does not reduce crime, and increasingly places Maryland in violation of federal law. These findings have shaped the Workgroup's current focus and will directly inform its forthcoming recommendations.

Outputs and Work Products

In its first year, the Workgroup supported a formal data request to the Judiciary seeking charge-level and disposition-level data on juveniles charged, convicted, and sentenced as adults, including demographic details, offense and sentencing information, and indicators of system transfer, to enable accurate accounting of youth case outcomes across both court systems. Members are finalizing a brief on Maryland's federal noncompliance, to be circulated to the full Commission. The document outlines key issues, compliance benchmarks, and immediate steps needed to bring Maryland closer to federal standards. In parallel, the group is engaging with the Judiciary, DJS, GOCPP, and county-level partners to identify interventions and shared solutions.

Next Steps

Looking ahead, the Workgroup will continue working with GOCPP and the Judiciary to support the development of a statewide IOJ response framework and identify judiciary liaisons who can support compliance reform. It will contribute to identifying system needs and recommending supports that strengthen front-end decision-making, including exploring how to ensure judges have timely, reliable information to make IOJ determinations within the federal six-hour window; increasing access to case context at initial detention points; advising adult facilities on appropriate intake and documentation procedures; expanding strategic engagement with the judiciary as a systems partner; and coordinating with district court leadership to explore

feasible paths to more consistent practices. In parallel, the group will continue drafting compliance-related recommendations and may propose policy changes, including possible revisions to Maryland's automatic transfer statute during the 2026 General Assembly.

Reflections and Considerations

The Processes and System Coordination Workgroup has surfaced one of the most urgent and complex challenges facing Maryland's juvenile justice system: its ongoing failure to comply with federal law in how it handles youth charged as adults. What began as a technical compliance issue has revealed a web of structural, legal, and operational dysfunctions that disproportionately harm Black and Brown youth and compromise the state's credibility and moral authority. The group is committed to developing solutions that are systemic, not symbolic, and that uphold the fundamental rights, dignity, and developmental needs of Maryland's youth.