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Defenders Petition Court for Mass Release of Children in Maryland's Juvenile Jails and Prisons; Demand DJS #BringOurKidsHome

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Three weeks into the COVID-19 outbreak, the number of young people incarcerated in Maryland remains dangerously high, leading to life-threatening conditions inside of juvenile facilities. To protect their young clients, defenders throughout Maryland have filed an [application for extraordinary relief](#) in the Maryland Court of Appeals to respond to the urgent health crisis caused by the coronavirus pandemic.

As noted in the [brief supporting the application](#): “It is not a question of if, but when COVID-19 will arrive in Maryland’s juvenile jails. ... In crowded, congregate facilities it is impossible for young people to maintain the recommended distance or take the necessary steps to sanitize the surfaces they encounter. Release is the only effective means of protecting young people from contracting and transmitting COVID-19. In fact, confining a large number of people to an enclosed area – like the Princess cruise ship or Life Care nursing home outbreaks demonstrate – creates the ideal breeding ground for the pandemic.”

There are an estimated 347 youth held in juvenile jail facilities and DJS run prisons - including children as young as 11 years old who health professionals say cannot be rendered safe. Nearly two weeks ago, scientists and public health professionals from across the country called [for the Maryland Department of Juvenile Services \(DJS\) to reduce the population in its youth prisons and jails](#).

The application asks the Court of Appeals to issue and order limiting the number of young people entering juvenile or pretrial detention; reducing the number of youth currently confined in jail; and ensuring the safety of youth returned home. Many young people are being held pretrial or for non-violent crimes, misdemeanors, or technical violations of probation who should be immediately released.

In addition to filing the application for extraordinary relief, OPD has launched its [#BringOurKidsHome campaign](#), which calls for DJS to take the following actions:

1. Work with Courts to immediately release the hundreds of youth who are currently being held in Maryland juvenile jails and youth prisons.
2. Halt all new admissions to juvenile jails and youth prisons to mitigate harm from Covid-19 pandemic.

3. Establish and share publicly a Covid-19 safety plan for all youth who remain in facilities to ensure they have proper access to cleaning and sanitation supplies, resources, support, and daily video contact with loved ones.

“Imagine how the fear and uncertainty we are all feeling about the pandemic are magnified for families whose children are locked into a high-risk environment?” said Jenny Egan, Chief Attorney for the Juvenile Division in OPD’s Baltimore City Office. “The Department of Juvenile Services has failed to respond to the significant dangers for incarcerated children, their families, and ultimately the entire community. It is time to bring our kids home now. ”

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