

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2026 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
First Reader

Senate Bill 602
Finance

(Senator Hester)

Algorithmic Addiction Fund - Establishment

This bill establishes the Algorithmic Addiction Fund to retain any civil penalties received by the State from specified judgments against or settlements relating to claims concerning harm to children from social media and improper algorithm use. The fund may be used only for specified algorithmic addiction-related spending. The Maryland Department of Health (MDH) must administer the fund. The Secretary of Health must (1) develop key goals, objectives, and performance indicators related to algorithmic addiction treatment and prevention; (2) consult with stakeholders at least once each year, as specified; and (3) by November 1 each year, report to the General Assembly on the fund, as specified. **The bill generally takes effect June 1, 2026, subject to specified contingencies.**

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: Because establishment of the special fund does not directly affect the total amount of funds available to Maryland under any specified judgment or settlement, it is not anticipated to significantly affect overall State finances, as discussed below. However, MDH general fund expenditures likely increase by an indeterminate amount to administer the fund beginning in the fiscal year in which the bill's contingency is met, as discussed below.

Local Effect: Local health departments, local school systems, and other local entities may benefit from the prescribed uses of the fund, as discussed below.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Bill Summary:

Algorithmic Addiction Fund

The fund is a special, nonlapsing fund. The fund consists of (1) all civil penalties received by the State from any source resulting, directly or indirectly, from a judgment against or settlement relating to claims concerning harm to children from the use of social media and improper use of algorithms made or prosecuted by the State to recover damages for violations of State law; (2) money appropriated in the State budget; and (3) interest earnings of the fund.

The fund may be used only to provide funds for:

- conducting a needs assessment throughout the State to determine where resources are needed and best practices for algorithmic addiction prevention, intervention, and treatment;
- improving and strengthening access to services proven to treat the mental and physical health impacts associated with algorithmic addiction;
- algorithmic addiction intervention services;
- algorithmic addiction prevention services;
- research and training for algorithmic addiction treatment and prevention, and social media and youth mental health, including administrative expenses; and
- supporting and expanding other evidence-based interventions for algorithmic addiction prevention and treatment.

If there are any funds in the Algorithmic Addiction Fund after satisfying the above requirements, MDH may use the unspent funds for youth mental health services. Money expended from the fund is supplemental to and is not intended to supplant funding that otherwise would be appropriated for such programs and services. Except as specified, money expended from the fund may not be used for administrative expenses.

Secretary of Health Requirements

The Secretary of Health must (1) develop key goals, objectives, and performance indicators related to algorithmic addiction treatment and prevention; (2) consult with algorithmic addiction treatment and prevention stakeholders at least once each year to identify recommended appropriations from the fund; and (3) by November 1 each year, report to the General Assembly on the fund. The annual report must include:

- an accounting of total expenditures from the fund in the immediately preceding fiscal year by (1) use; (2) jurisdiction (if applicable); and (3) budget program and subdivision;
- the performance indicators and progress toward achieving the goals and objectives as developed by the Secretary; and
- the recommended appropriations from the fund that the Secretary has identified in consultation with stakeholders.

Civil Penalties Received from a Judgment or Settlement

Any appropriation of civil penalties that are received directly or indirectly from a judgment against or settlement with technology and social media companies and conglomerates must be made in accordance with the allocation and distribution of funds as agreed on in any State-subdivision agreement as amended. The Attorney General must identify and designate the controlling version of the specified agreement. Additionally, the Secretary of Health must establish and administer a grant program for the distribution of funds to political subdivisions in accordance with any State-subdivision agreement, as amended.

Effective Date and Contingency

The bill is contingent on a judgment by a State or federal court against, or settlement with, technology or social media conglomerates or companies relating to any claims made or prosecuted by the State to recover damage for violations of State law. The bill takes effect on the date that a specified notice from the Attorney General is received by the Department of Legislative Services.

Current Law:

Cigarette Restitution Fund

Chapters 172 and 173 of 1999 established the Cigarette Restitution Fund (CRF), which is supported by payments made under the Master Settlement Agreement (MSA). Through the MSA, settling tobacco manufacturers pay the litigating parties – 46 states, five territories, and the District of Columbia – substantial annual payments in perpetuity. The distribution of MSA funds among the states is determined by formula.

The use of CRF funds is restricted by statute. The Governor must include appropriations from CRF in the annual budget bill equivalent to the lesser of \$100.0 million or 90% of the funds estimated to be available to CRF in the fiscal year for which the appropriations are made. At least 30% of the appropriations must be made to Medicaid. At least 50% of the appropriations must be dedicated to the Tobacco Use Prevention and Cessation Program; the Cancer Prevention, Education, Screening, and Treatment Program; specified activities of the Southern Maryland Agricultural Development Commission; and other programs that

serve specified purposes. For each fiscal year for which appropriations are made, 0.15% of CRF must be appropriated for the purposes of enforcement of Title 16, Subtitle 5 of the Business Regulation Article (which governs escrow requirements for nonparticipating tobacco product manufacturers). Any additional appropriations from CRF may be made for any lawful purpose.

Chapter 348 of 2023 requires CRF to include a separate account consisting of payments received by the State from any judgment, settlement, penalty, offer of compromise, or any other enforcement action related to the sale and marketing of electronic smoking devices. Distributions from the separate account may be used, consistent with any other provision of State law, to supplement general fund appropriations for specified programs that aim to reduce the use of tobacco products by individuals younger than age 21.

Opioid Restitution Fund

Chapter 537 of 2019 established the Opioid Restitution Fund (ORF), a special fund to retain any revenues received by the State relating to specified opioid judgments or settlements, which may be used only to provide funds for the purposes specified in settlement agreements, including:

- programs, services, supports, and resources for evidence-based substance use disorder (SUD) prevention, treatment, recovery, or harm reduction;
- community-based nonprofit recovery organizations that provide nonclinical substance abuse recovery support services in the State;
- addressing racial and socioeconomic disparities in access to prevention, harm reduction, treatment, and recovery support services;
- evidence-informed SUD prevention, treatment recovery, or harm reduction pilot programs or demonstration studies that are not evidence based if the advisory council determines that emerging evidence supports funding or that there is a reasonable basis for funding with the expectation of creating an evidence-based program and approves the use of money for the pilot program or demonstration study;
- evaluations of the effectiveness and outcomes reporting for SUD abatement infrastructure, programs, services, supports, and resources for which the fund is used;
- operating expenses and personnel costs for investigations and enforcement actions under the Opioids Enforcement Unit within the Office of the Attorney General (OAG); and
- the buprenorphine training grant program.

Through the end of fiscal 2025, Maryland has received more than \$245.8 million from opioid settlements. By October 2038, the State is projected to receive more than

\$670.8 million in opioid settlement revenue, which is split between local jurisdictions and ORF.

Under the National Opioid Settlement, Maryland's settlement revenues are directed into four distinct funding streams for expenditure; the amount in each stream must ultimately reach a specified percentage of total awards, with only 75% flowing through ORF, as follows:

- **Local Direct Funds (25%):** Direct payments from settlement administrators to participating subdivisions. As of the end of fiscal 2025, this accounts for approximately \$53.6 million in revenues paid directly to local jurisdictions.
- **Targeted Abatement Grant Funds (45%):** Funds deposited into ORF that must be used for formula-based grants for participating subdivisions. As of the end of fiscal 2025, this accounts for approximately \$97.0 million in ORF revenues.
- **State Discretionary Abatement Fund (15%):** Funds that must be made available for competitive grants. As of the end of fiscal 2025, this accounts for approximately \$38.0 million in ORF revenues.
- **State Allocation Funds (15%):** Funds that may be spent at the State's discretion, within allowable parameters. As of the end of fiscal 2025, this accounts for approximately \$57.3 million in ORF revenues.

State Fiscal Effect: Because creation of the special fund does not directly affect the total amount of funds available to Maryland under any judgment or settlement, it is not anticipated to materially affect overall State finances. In the absence of the bill, this analysis assumes the monies would be received as special funds within OAG's Division of Consumer Protection (with a portion potentially directed to the general fund). Under the bill, the monies are instead directed to a new special fund. The bill charges the Comptroller and Treasurer with accounting for and holding the fund, respectively. The bill also establishes how the monies may be expended; otherwise, under the assumption above, the monies would be used to fund OAG activities and presumably compensate outside counsel who assisted in the investigation.

Maryland Department of Health

MDH likely requires additional personnel and resources to administer the fund, develop key goals, and issue the annual report, but actual overall costs are dependent on the amount of funds received. As the bill prohibits monies in the fund from being used for administrative purposes (with the exception of those related to research and training for algorithmic addiction treatment and prevention and social media and youth mental health), general fund expenditures increase by an indeterminate amount to administer the fund, develop key goals, and issue a report beginning in the fiscal year in which the bill's contingency is met and the fund takes effect.

Based on an analysis of similar legislation, development of key goals and annual consultation with algorithmic addiction treatment and prevention stakeholders likely requires contractual services of at least \$50,000 annually.

State Revenues: Although the bill indicates that interest earnings of the new special fund remain in the fund, the bill does not amend Section 8 of Chapter 717 of 2024 (the Budget Reconciliation and Financing Act of 2024) which requires, notwithstanding any other provision of law, that interest earnings from special funds (with certain exceptions) accrue to the general fund from fiscal 2024 through 2028. Thus, general fund revenues increase minimally from interest earnings of the new special fund through fiscal 2028. The fund is exempted from a similar requirement under § 6-226(a)(2) of the State Finance and Procurement Article that applies from fiscal 2029 forward.

Local Fiscal Effect: To the extent that awards are received through litigation or settlement and accrue to the fund, and grants from the fund are awarded to local health departments, local school systems, or other local entities to help address algorithmic addiction, local revenues and expenditures increase, potentially significantly.

Additional Comments: In October 2023, 41 states and the District of Columbia filed a 233-page complaint in the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California against Meta Platforms, Inc.; Instagram, LLC; Meta Payments, Inc.; and Meta Platforms Technologies, LLC. The complaint generally alleges that Meta builds addictive features into its social media platforms (*e.g.*, Instagram and Facebook) that harm children, specifically the mental health of children.

Additional Information

Recent Prior Introductions: Similar legislation has been introduced within the last three years. See SB 739 and HB 1119 of 2024.

Designated Cross File: HB 715 (Delegate Rosenberg) - Appropriations and Economic Matters.

Information Source(s): Comptroller's Office; Maryland Department of Health; Judiciary (Administrative Office of the Courts); Department of Legislative Services

Fiscal Note History: First Reader - February 22, 2026
caw/jc

Analysis by: Eliana R. Prober

Direct Inquiries to:
(410) 946-5510
(301) 970-5510