

Department of Legislative Services
 Maryland General Assembly
 2026 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
First Reader

Senate Bill 715 (Washington County Senators)
 Judicial Proceedings

Washington County - Juveniles - Truancy Reduction Pilot Program

This bill authorizes the Circuit Administrative Judge of the Fourth Circuit to establish a Truancy Reduction Pilot Program (TRPP) in the juvenile court in Washington County.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: General fund expenditures for the Judiciary increase by \$155,000 annually for program grant funding. The bill may have an operational impact on the Office of the Public Defender, as discussed below. Revenues are not affected.

(in dollars)	FY 2027	FY 2028	FY 2029	FY 2030	FY 2031
Revenues	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
GF Expenditure	155,000	155,000	155,000	155,000	155,000
Net Effect	(\$155,000)	(\$155,000)	(\$155,000)	(\$155,000)	(\$155,000)

Note: () = decrease; GF = general funds; FF = federal funds; SF = special funds; - = indeterminate increase; (-) = indeterminate decrease

Local Effect: Local grant revenues and corresponding expenditures for Washington County increase by \$155,000 annually from grant funding and program implementation. Otherwise, the bill is not anticipated to materially affect county finances, as discussed below.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Current Law:

Truancy Reduction Pilot Program

Under § 7-301 of the Education Article, subject to limited exceptions, each child who

resides in the State and is age 5 or older and younger than age 18 must attend a public school regularly during the entire school year. A child who is required by law to attend school and is habitually truant can be designated a Child in Need of Supervision, which makes the child subject to the jurisdiction of the juvenile court under Title 3, Subtitle 8A of the Courts and Judicial Proceedings Article. However, current law (Title 3, Subtitle 8C of the Courts and Judicial Proceedings Article) also sets forth specific procedures for addressing truancy in jurisdictions in which a TRPP has been established. In a county in which a TRPP has been established, an authorized school official may file with the juvenile court a petition alleging that a child who is required to attend school failed to do so without lawful excuse, as specified.

Circuit Administrative Judges of the First, Second, Third, and Seventh circuits may establish TRPPs within their judicial circuits. Dorchester, Frederick, Harford, Kent, Prince George's, Somerset, Talbot, Wicomico, and Worcester counties are currently authorized to have TRPPs.

Dispositions under a Truancy Program

When making a disposition on a petition that has been filed as part of a TRPP, the court may order the child to (1) attend school; (2) perform community service; (3) attend counseling, including family counseling; (4) attend substance abuse evaluation and treatment; (5) attend mental health evaluation and treatment; or (6) keep a curfew with the hours set by the court. The court must retain jurisdiction until every condition of the court's order is satisfied.

Truancy Programs – Adults

Section 7-301 of the Education Article also requires a person who has legal custody or care and control of a child who is at least age 5, but younger than age 16, to see that the child attends school or receives instruction. A violator is guilty of a misdemeanor. For a first conviction, the violator is subject to maximum penalties of a fine of \$50 per unlawful day of absence and/or three days imprisonment. For a second or subsequent conviction, the violator is subject to maximum penalties of a fine of \$100 per day of unlawful absence and/or five days imprisonment.

Any person who induces or attempts to induce a child to be unlawfully absent from school or employs or harbors any child who is absent unlawfully from school while school is in session is guilty of a misdemeanor, punishable by a fine of up to \$500 and/or imprisonment for up to 30 days. In a county that has established a TRPP, a charge may be filed in the juvenile court and assigned to a truancy docket for disposition. The court may condition marking a charge as a stet on the defendant's participation in the appropriate TRPP.

Annual Reporting Requirements

By November 1 of each year, the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Maryland must report to the General Assembly on each established TRPP. Chapter 577 of 2025 requires the annual report to include (1) the number of TRPPs established in the State; (2) the number of participants in each TRPP; (3) information on the outcomes of the participants in each TRPP; and (4) recommendations to improve the function of current TRPPs. Chapter 577 terminates December 31, 2026.

State and Local Fiscal Effect: The Judiciary's Office of Problem-Solving Courts (OPSC) advises that it provides annual reimbursable grants to each circuit court that operates a truancy program, and \$155,000 is the standard annual anticipated cost for a truancy program. OPSC previously advised that county supporting agencies do provide support staff or services where needed for TRPPs (*e.g.*, a pupil placement worker provided by a local school board). While Washington County did not respond to a request for information on the fiscal and operational impact of the bill, it is assumed Washington County can otherwise implement a TRPP with existing resources.

OPD advises that truancy programs generate additional cases based on charges against parents for truant behavior and increased level of effort in juvenile cases with clients who have both a delinquency matter and a truancy matter, to ensure that their rights are protected. Based on projected caseloads and best practices standards, OPD estimates the need for 150 attorneys and 37 secretaries if a TRPP is established in Washington County. At this time, the Department of Legislative Services is unable to independently verify the need for *any* additional OPD resources *solely* as a result of the implementation of a TRPP in Washington County. Should *actual* workloads necessitate additional personnel, OPD can request those resources through the annual budget process.

Additional Information

Recent Prior Introductions: Similar legislation has not been introduced within the last three years.

Designated Cross File: HB 1457 (Washington County Delegation) - Judiciary.

Information Source(s): Judiciary (Administrative Office of the Courts); Department of Juvenile Services; Office of the Public Defender; Department of Legislative Services

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jg/aad

Analysis by: Amanda L. Douglas

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