



House Bill 126

Public Safety – Pretrial Services Program Grant Fund – Extension and Program Requirements

MACo Position: **SUPPORT**

To: Judiciary Committee

Date: January 26, 2021

From: Michael Sanderson

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **SUPPORTS** HB 126. This bill would extend a grant program designed to promote locally-supported pretrial release programs, and also adds the condition that continued receipt of state funding depends upon jurisdictions discontinuing practices of billing program participants. Counties are willing to accept this incentive-laden approach going forward and support this compromise proposal.

Maryland, like many states, has promoted advances in criminal justice – ranging from broad-based sentencing reforms to procedural changes for pretrial defendants in local facilities. The move toward pretrial alternatives to confinement has been productive and positive, in general, and is at its best when aided by an appropriate assessment tool. Maryland has provided state grant funding for jurisdictions advancing these best practices, but that funding is set to expire without an extension.

During prior year legislative hearings, bill sponsors and committee members have expressed concern over local jails and their vendors, in some cases, charging pretrial defendants to help offset costs of their alternative arrangements – typically GPS-style location devices to effect home-based requirements. HB 126 proposes to merge these two related ideas – to extend the beneficial state funding, but to condition access to it upon elimination of such fees. Counties recognize the benefits of finding a suitable disposition to both lingering issues, and support this framework.

HB 126 will extend incentives for county pretrial programs, and further advance fairness and flexibility for affected defendants. For these reasons, MACo **SUPPORTS** HB 126 and urges a **FAVORABLE** report.