

Baltimore youth detention facility forces its residents to go without heating during early winter cold snap

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Juveniles in Baltimore's Youth Detention Center were forced to endure weeks without central heating after the facility's system malfunctioned between late November and mid-December. The facility's 60 detainees, all under the age of 18, were forced to use thin hospital blankets as temperatures dropped to nearly 50 degrees Fahrenheit following the Thanksgiving holiday last month.

On December 12, the Maryland Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services (DPSCS), which oversees the state's prison system, stated it had fixed the heating situation. This means that for over two weeks the center's youth inmates were forced to huddle in blankets to remain warm. During the same span of time, temperatures plunged in the US Mid-Atlantic into the teens, remaining at below-freezing temperatures for nearly two weeks.

The facility houses juveniles charged as adults and awaiting trial. "When the heat failed, children were left freezing. The state acted with no urgency," said Maryland Public Defender Natasha Dartigue at a press conference outside the facility on December 8. The DPSCS later brought in four industrial-grade electric heaters in the affected male housing unit.

Dartigue was joined by officials from American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) Local 1427, which represents correctional workers, and a few criminal justice reform organizations, who have echoed calls to end the practice of charging youths as adults.

At the press conference, James Dold, who spoke on behalf of Human Rights for Kids, a non-profit organization focused on child imprisonment in the United States, shed more light on the conditions in the

facilities.

He noted that the facility is overcrowded and that many of the detainees have experienced physical or sexual abuse. "They are the most vulnerable and victimized children in our community," Dold pointed out. Dold added that the Democratic governor Wes Moore "has to own this. The Moore administration has to own this."

This incident has increased calls to stop the practice of charging juveniles as adults in the state of Maryland for committing certain offenses. State law currently lists 33 offenses, including murder and rape, that automatically send accused children as young as 14 to adult detention centers and criminal court.

Heat was eventually restored on December 12, after the department secured a necessary replacement part for the heating system through an emergency procurement. This was eight days after the department publicly stated the system was down.

According to advocates, over 80 percent of the minors charged as adults have their cases dismissed or are sent back to juvenile court. Over 85 percent of the children charged as adults are black, exemplifying the racial disparities in Baltimore policing.

These disparities extend throughout Maryland's criminal justice system. According to a 2021 report published by the ACLU, from 2015 to 2019, 91 percent of corrections officers' use of force was targeted toward black residents.

While black people comprise 31 percent of Maryland's population, they make up 70 percent of those in prison.

This incident reflects the systemic underfunding and neglect that characterizes the ruling class's approach to

youth incarceration. According to a 2025 state legal briefing, the state of Maryland “ranks second, behind Alabama, for the number of teens between the ages of 14 and 17 who are automatically sent to adult court.”

Instead of addressing poverty, housing insecurity and the worsening mental health crisis, which all contribute to juvenile delinquency, both the Democrats and Republicans have responded with criminalization and incarceration nationally. This is a far cheaper political solution for the ruling class than expanding social programs.

In an attempt to appease the fascistic Trump administration’s attack on immigrants and working people under the cover of supposedly fighting “crime,” the Moore administration in September surged state law enforcement into Baltimore. As of November, the surge was “ongoing and based on regular analysis between [Maryland State Police] and [Baltimore police],” indicating Moore has no intention of withdrawing state forces from the city.

This attitude is reflected in the austerity budget advanced by Governor Moore for the current fiscal year ending in June 2026.

Moore’s proposal calls for \$2 billion in cuts to address a \$3 billion deficit. This includes \$116 million in cuts to healthcare programs, including \$25 million in funding for Maryland’s 988 hotline, which is meant to help prevent suicide by providing counselors for callers experiencing mental distress. Suicide is the second-leading cause of death for people ages 10 to 14 and third for people ages 15 to 24 nationwide, per the most recent Centers for Disease Control (CDC) data.

Moore’s budget proposal also has \$90 million in cuts in funding for school mental health services, even though demand for mental healthcare has been increasing in recent years, especially among young people. Over 28 percent of Maryland high school students reported their mental health was not good at most or all times, according to findings from the 2022–23 Youth Risk Behavior Survey.

In addition, according to the National Association of School Psychologists, Maryland does not have enough school psychologists, with 1,066 students per school psychologist in 2024. Their recommended ratio is one school psychologist per 500 students.

This lack of mental health resources compounds the financial challenges facing Maryland’s urban

communities. Baltimore City, which has historically been run by the Democrats, has a 20.3 percent poverty rate and a per capita income of just \$34,378, according to the 2020 U.S. Census.

The heating system failure is a small but revealing expression of the ruling class’s real attitude toward the poor, working population and youth of Baltimore. Far from representing a more “enlightened” wing of American capitalism, the Democratic Party is fully prepared to employ the same criminal methods as the Republican Party.



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