

INDYPENDENT READER

toward building a new society on the vacant lots of the old . . .

Published on *Independent Reader* (<https://indyreader.org>)

[Home](#) > O'Malley's March Backwards: Governor Refuses To Lead On Youth Jail

O'Malley's March Backwards: Governor Refuses To Lead On Youth Jail

Contributed by:

Reverend Heber Brown, III[1]

Tuesday, September 18, 2012 - 08:24



During the recent Democratic National Convention before a raucous crowd and a national audience, Maryland Governor and Democratic Governors Association President, Martin O'Malley, stood to deliver his best argument as to why President Barack Obama deserved a second presidential term.

As O'Malley touted the President's activities and accomplishments, his speech took on a cadence that invited a call-and-response chant throughout the convention center in Charlotte. He peppered his prepared remarks with the line: *"Together with President Obama, we are moving America forward, not back!"* The crowd caught the hint and joined in with O'Malley time and time again as the moment took on a pep rally character.

The irony of this scene, however, was not lost on those of us in Maryland who have been working relentlessly to halt the construction of a multi-million dollar youth jail [2] in East Baltimore. It was befuddling to hear the Governor's pitch for progressive, forward-thinking politics when his own

plans, as they relate to juvenile justice in Maryland, are draconian and backward-looking.

Since the Ehrlich Administration, the state has been working to expand the [Prison Industrial Complex](#) [3] by building what was initially slated to be a 230-bed capacity jail for youth charged as adults in Baltimore City. Currently, youth in this category are housed in their own section of the Baltimore City Detention Center (BCDC) – a facility designed for adult inmates. There is little disagreement that youth at BCDC have no business there. Having witnessed first-hand the deplorable conditions of the juvenile wing of this facility while serving in a mentoring program, I'm a witness that a new plan is needed.

However, there is much debate on which direction should be taken to rectify this situation.

While O'Malley Administration officials have committed to the knee-jerk public safety response of proposing the construction of a new jail as the ultimate solution to current conditions, I and many others have urged elected officials to give attention to other potential indicators of where we can go from here.

According to the [Campaign for Youth Justice](#) [4], states across the country, including neighboring states like Pennsylvania and Virginia are successfully housing youth charged as adults in juvenile detention facilities with no increase in crime or delinquency. National trends are pointing the way for Governor O'Malley and a bevy of research-based reports against the youth jail are piling up on his desk.

Reports by the Just Kids Partnership, National Council on Crime and Delinquency, and Stop The Youth Jail Alliance all indicate that new policies are needed, not a multi-million dollar youth jail.¹ It has become more and more difficult to ignore the red flags flapping in the wind in relation to the youth jail proposal, but somehow Governor O'Malley is finding a way to do it.

Multiple alternative avenues have been proposed and countless ideas have been offered up as to how the capital and operating funds slated for youth incarceration can be used for positive youth and community development. There are no more viable excuses as to why these options cannot be explored in earnest. All that is needed is some gubernatorial leadership and the community is waiting and if need be willing to push the Governor to provide it.

With few notable exceptions, most democratic lawmakers both in Annapolis and in Baltimore City are following the script of the Governor. They are regurgitating rational-sounding defenses for the youth jail project that only make sense in the minds of those who have not been paying attention. Most of the lawmakers at City Hall and in the State Legislature will be obedient to what O'Malley tells them to do. He provides their talking points. He tells them what "we" think. Using his "bully pulpit," he defines state priorities and creates a sense of urgency on issues that he wants to saturate local media and to dominate public discourse.

Concerning the youth jail plan, academics have had their say. Nonprofit leaders have contributed their insightful resources. Grassroots activists have made their point with clarity. Clergy have weighed in with profound moral arguments. Youth have spoken out with passion and all we're waiting on now is for Governor Martin O'Malley to join in and provide the leadership unique to his office. A posture of convenient silence is not acceptable even when building platforms for higher office.

A broad coalition of residents and even national stakeholders have spoken. We don't want the

state of Maryland to finance another multi-million dollar youth jail in Baltimore City!

In a day when schools, recreation centers, and pools are dancing on the edge of closure because of alleged state and municipal funding restrictions, it's time for Governor Martin O'Malley to work with us to move Maryland forward not back!

In a day when the criminalization of youth runs rampant and they are regularly framed as "problems to be solved" rather than gifts to be nurtured and heeded, it's time for Governor Martin O'Malley to work with us to move Maryland forward not back!

In a day when the Black Community is demanding the right to control the politics of their own communities and courageously confronting the vestiges of institutional racism that have for far too long enslaved them, it's time for Governor Martin O'Malley to work with us to move Maryland forward not back!

Our resolve and convictions are unwavering. We are marching toward a future for Maryland's youth – and particularly Baltimore's Black youth that invests more energy and resources to lifting them up and not locking them up.

The only question that remains now is in which direction will O'Malley march?

Rev. Heber Brown, III is an activist, writer, and pastor of Pleasant Hope Baptist Church in North Baltimore City. For more information on the campaign to stop the Youth Jail or to get involved email Rev. Brown at pastor@pleasanthope.org[5]

--

¹See the Just Kids Partnership October 2010 report, "*Baltimore Youth In The Adult Criminal Justice System* [6]," the National Council on Crime and Delinquency May 2011 report, "*Bed Space Forecast For Baltimore Youth Detention Facility* [7]," and the Stop The Youth Jail Alliance August 2011 report, "*Proposed Alternative Action Plan For The Construction Of A Youth Jail In Baltimore City* [8]."

Source URL: <https://indyreader.org/content/o%E2%80%99malley%E2%80%99s-march-backwards-governor-refuses-lead-youth-jail>

Links:

[1] <https://indyreader.org/contributor/reverend-heber-brown-iii>

[2] <http://indyreader.org/content/face-our-future-states-plan-build-new-youth-jail-and-campaign-defeat-it>

[3] <http://criticalresistance.org/about/not-so-common-language/>

[4] http://www.campaignforyouthjustice.org/documents/CFYJ_State_Trends_Report.pdf

[5] <mailto:pastor@pleasanthope.org>

[6] <http://justkidsmaryland.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/JustKidsRptOct2010small.pdf>

[7] http://www.nccdglobal.org/sites/default/files/publication_pdf/forecast-bedspace.pdf

[8] http://stopbaltimoreyouthjail.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/Alternative_Action_Plan1.pdf