

# APPALACHIAN JUVENILE COMMISSION

P.O. BOX 16248  
BRISTOL, VIRGINIA 24209

Phone 276-466-7800 • Fax 276-466-7820  
WEB - [hjdc.org](http://hjdc.org)

1/26/24

Delegate Wiley,

As Chair of the Appalachian Juvenile Commission (AJC), I would like to extend the AJC's full support for House Bill 1438, which may potentially extend enhanced retirement benefits for juvenile detention specialists. Our Commission is a political subdivision consisting of local government appointed representatives from each of the eleven localities we serve in Southwest Virginia; Lee, Scott, Wise, Russell, Buchanan, Dickenson, Tazewell, Washington, Smith, and the Cities of Norton and Bristol, VA. The AJC provides a continuum of dispositional options to our region, including secure detention at the Highlands Juvenile Detention Center (HJDC).

The AJC believes the passing of HB 1438 would be a tremendous benefit to our staff, who potentially put themselves in harm's way every day they enter the HJDC. Our staff provide supportive supervision in a secure custody setting to Virginia's most vulnerable youth, many of whom have significant behavioral and mental health challenges, along with aggressive and violent tendencies. Our counterparts working at Bon Air Juvenile Correctional Center located in Chesterfield, who do this same work with these same children, have been receiving enhanced retirement benefits for many years. The AJC believes that this benefit should be applied to our detention specialists as well. The HJDC is currently housing DJJ committed youth who would likely be detained at Bon Air JDC, if there were enough bedspace for a placement.

As a JLARC report concluded, our staff have a moderate-high degree of encountering physical and psychological harm on the job. According to the report, "The risk for workplace injuries is high, with approximately 13 percent of local detention specialists filing at least one paid workers' compensation claim each year. This rate is comparable to the claims rate for local police officers and deputy sheriffs. Local detention specialists are at high risk for encountering violent or threatening youth detained at a facility. Detention specialists interviewed by JLARC staff recounted injuries sustained during assaults, and paid workers' compensation claims filed by detention specialists commonly involve altercations with residents".

In closing, our detention specialists make a significant positive impact on our vulnerable and at times dangerous youth. The AJC supports HB 1438, which could hopefully extend enhanced retirement benefits to detention specialists, thereby aiding in reducing recruitment and retention challenges. The AJC supports our entire team who have chosen the potentially dangerous, yet rewarding career path of a detention specialist.

Sincerely,



James C. Lane, Chair  
Chief of Police, City of Norton, VA

*"SERVING SOUTHWEST VIRGINIA"*

*Bristol, Buchanan, Dickenson, Lee, Norton, Russell, Scott, Smyth, Tazewell, Washington, Wise*