

# Overhaul of juvenile system dies

**Glendening resists  
oversight panel to  
watch new director**

**'It was a beginning'**

**Reform advocates  
angered; ex-police  
chief takes reins**

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An ambitious package of legislation to overhaul the state's troubled juvenile justice system was pronounced dead yesterday after Gov. Parris N. Glendening urged the General Assembly to give the agency's new leader a free hand — a trade-off that immediately angered reform advocates.

Supporters of a bill that would have created an oversight commission for the department acknowledged the measure's demise and blamed Glendening, who said the panel was unnecessary with former public safety chief Bishop L. Robinson coming in to head the agency.

"It would be an affront, quite candidly, to Bishop Robinson," the governor told reporters. "We do not need

another bureaucracy."

But juvenile advocates were angry with the bill's impending defeat and said the administration would be held responsible for any problems in state youth facilities that might have been identified early by the commission.

"By the administration defeating this bill, they're telling us we want direct responsibility for what happens in these facilities," said Vincent Schiraldi, director of the Center on Juvenile Crime and Justice. "If

something bad happens to the kids, we're going to hold the administration accountable."

As expected yesterday, Glendening formally appointed Robinson, 73, the department's interim secretary, to take over the juvenile department on a full-time basis. Within minutes, the Senate waived its customary hearing on Cabinet appointments and confirmed Robinson unanimously.

Moments later, the Senate shocked juvenile advocates by reversing itself and killing a relatively minor bill to create an advisory committee to study racial disparities within the system.

"That sends a clear message. The bottom line is give Bishop room," said Sen. Philip C. Jimeno, point man on juvenile justice issues for the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee, who agreed with the administration's moves yesterday.

Jimeno made clear that a package of three other reform bills would also not be passed before the Assembly adjourns Monday night. "To be honest, I think the bills are dead because the message the Senate sent today is we want to give him the room to develop his action plan," said Jimeno, an Anne Arundel Democrat.

Advocates who had fought for the reform package were disappointed at the turn of events.

"If there was a commitment to reform and the administration got behind these bills, they wouldn't be in trouble," said Jim McComb, chairman of the Maryland Juvenile Justice Coalition, an umbrella organization of advocacy groups.

"We aren't going to stop pushing these issues. That's a promise."

News reports in December revealed that delinquent youths sent to three state boot camps in Western Maryland were beaten and abused. After they were sent back to their homes on "maximum supervised probation," the state agency provided little or no follow-up.

Within a week of the reports, five top officials in the agency, including Secretary Gilberto de Jesus, were ousted and Robinson was brought in as acting secretary. Glendening and his point person on criminal justice issues, Lt. Governor Kathleen Kennedy Townsend, vowed sweeping changes in the agency.

After the General Assembly convened in January, advocates crafted a package of bills to provide oversight and force changes in the troubled department.

The bills, which were sponsored by Del. Kenneth C. Montague Jr., passed the House of Delegates but have sat in the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee.