

In the counties, juvenile delinquency was less acute. Nevertheless, in 1916 county circuit courts were empowered to designate a judge who would hear, try, and determine cases of dependent, neglected or delinquent children (Chapter 326, Acts of 1916). For the first time, the law defined a delinquent child as a boy under age 20 or a girl under age 18 who had violated a criminal law; was incorrigible; associated with thieves or other depraved persons; was growing up in idleness or crime; frequented gambling places; beer saloons and other unsavory places; or was guilty of indecent, immoral or lascivious behavior. Each circuit court was to appoint paid probation officers. The law also prohibited confinement of a child under age 14 in a jail or police station with other prisoners.

Public concern about child welfare prompted the Governor to appoint two commissions: the Children's Code Commission of 1922, and the Commission on Laws of Minors, which completed its work in 1924. Instigated by the League of Women Voters, the Children's Code Commission found that many children were trapped in the juvenile system and cited the case of a 2 and 1/2 year old child, committed to reform school as an incorrigible minor. Committed children remained in custody of reformatories until they reached age 21. Both commissions reviewed all laws in Maryland relating to minors and found that despite the 1916 statute, only seven counties had established juvenile courts. The Commissions recommended that juvenile courts be mandated, and decisions of the Juvenile Court of Baltimore City be given more judicial weight so as to be less easily reversed. Further, they found that supervision of children's welfare ought to be vested in one agency, the State Board of Welfare. Perhaps because a Judiciary Commission was at the same time studying ways to revise the whole judicial system, no action was taken until 1931 to make juvenile courts more effective.

In 1931, juvenile jurisdiction was removed from the county circuit courts (Chapter 323, Acts of 1931). The Governor appointed an additional justice of the peace for each county to serve as Magistrate for Juvenile Causes with criminal jurisdiction and exclusive jurisdiction over cases of commitment of minors under age 16. The Magistrate was authorized to conduct informal hearings, place a minor on probation at any stage of the court proceeding, or cause the minor to be examined by a doctor, psychiatrist, or psychologist. A minor, upon arrest, would be detained in a suitable place such as a juvenile institution, not the county jail. In each county, the Governor appointed juvenile court committees to confer with and assist the Magistrate for Juvenile Causes. The Magistrate named probation officers with constabulary authority who were required to have at least one year's experience in social work. The 1931 law, however, did not apply to Baltimore City, or Allegany, Washington and Baltimore counties.

The rate of juvenile crime increased in the 1940s and, in Maryland, focused attention on the place of minors within the criminal justice system. After public outcry, the Governor appointed a commission in 1940 and another in 1941 to study the problem. They drew similar conclusions. Only eight counties had juvenile courts, probation officers, or someplace other than the county jail for detention of minors. Only four counties had active juvenile court committees. In Baltimore City, the Juvenile Court lacked authority to handle felonies committed by children and needed a temporary detention center. In 1943, the Maryland Commission on Juvenile Delinquency called for reform of the juvenile courts, and for study and implementation of crime prevention plans. The Commission agreed with recommendations of the White House Conference of 1940 that juvenile courts should adjudicate, but treatment functions should be assigned to State and local departments of child welfare. Reforming juvenile courts included ending the system of magistrates for juvenile causes; defining the age limit for juvenile offenders; distinguishing between criminal and juvenile causes; and giving exclusive jurisdiction for juvenile causes to the Circuit Courts of the counties and the Supreme Bench of Baltimore City. Thereafter, the juvenile causes law was revised first for Baltimore City and then for the counties.

In 1943, the old magistrate court for Baltimore City was abolished and a new Circuit Court for Juvenile Causes established (Chapter 818, Acts of 1943). A Master of Juvenile Causes could conduct preliminary hearings and commit children to the State Department of Public Welfare. For Baltimore City, the law defined a child as being under age 16. In 1945, the State juvenile causes law was revised. It abolished the magistrate system, gave exclusive jurisdiction in juvenile cases to the county circuit court, and defined a child to be under age 18 (Chapter 797, Acts of 1945). No longer could a child be charged with the commission of any crime. Under the new law, a minor under age 18 could be charged only as a dependent, delinquent, neglected or feeble-minded child. Appointed by the judge, probation officers still were to make preliminary and follow-up investigations. In any case concerning a child, the judge could dismiss the case; place the child on probation; give custody of the child to a public or private institution or person; or, in cases which would be a misdemeanor or felony if committed by an adult, waive jurisdiction. Some counties were not covered by the new law.

Further reform came in 1969 when the concept of a "child in need of supervision" (CINS) became significant. Such a child was defined as habitually truant, disobedient, ungovernable, a danger to himself or others, or one who had committed an offense applicable only to children, and required guidance, treatment, or rehabilitation (Chapter 432, Acts of 1969). Previously, a CINS had been included in the definition of delinquent child, who