

NEWS > POLITICS

Maryland Gov. Wes Moore's outreach to young men draws praise — and questions



Maryland Gov. Wes Moore speaks to reporters as Rep. Jim Clyburn, D-S.C., left, and Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz look on at Clyburn's World Famous Fish, Friday, May 30, 2025, in Columbia, S.C. (AP Photo/Meg Kinnard)



By **KATHARINE WILSON** | kwilson@baltsun.com

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Young men drifted away from the Democratic Party in the 2024 election, but some party leaders see Maryland Gov. Wes Moore as a model for how to bring them back.

Moore, 46, an Army veteran and first-term governor, has asked his administration to find ways to better support young men and boys — groups he says are falling behind in education, economic mobility and mental health.

“For him, it’s not a show,” said Young Democrats of America President Quentin Wathum-Ocama. He’s “articulating a vision that shows young men ... here’s an opportunity for you to be a strong man, to be somebody who cares about their family, but also cares about community.”

Moore said Democrats need to stop treating young men as a voting bloc to recapture, and start treating them as people who need help. He cites his administration's focus on reducing incarceration and economic insecurity as part of that focus.

"Once you're losing people in elections, that's not because you just started losing them," Moore said in an interview with The Baltimore Sun. "It's because you lost them a long time ago."

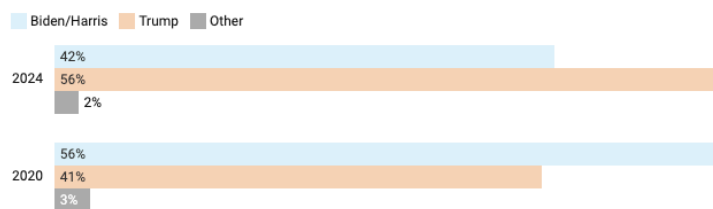
Nationally, politicians have begun exploring similar outreach. California Gov. Gavin Newsom launched a podcast, Utah Gov. Spencer Cox created a task force focused on the well-being of boys and men, and New York Democrats appear to have nominated 33-year-old Zohran Mamdani for New York City mayor, who ran a heavily social-media-based campaign. Multiple political analysts and Democratic leaders told The Sun that Moore's approach comes across as authentic, with policy ideas to back him up.

But Republicans in Maryland question whether Moore's rhetoric has translated into measurable results.

Democrats losing ground with young men

Support for Democrats among young men fell sharply in 2024. Just 42% of men aged 18 to 29 voted Democratic, down from 56% in 2020, according to a Tufts University CIRCLE analysis.

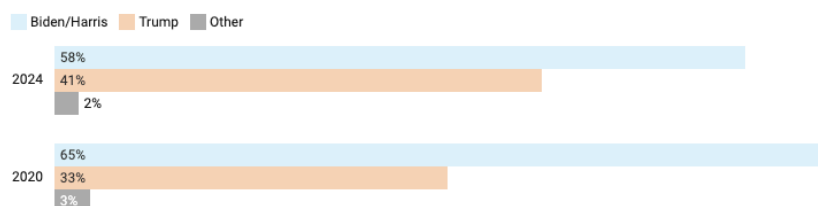
Male U.S. voters 18-29



Percentages are rounded.

Source: Tufts University Tisch College · CIRCLE analysis of AP VoteCast Survey · Created with Datawrapper

Female U.S. voters 18-29



Percentages are rounded.

Source: Tufts University Tisch College · CIRCLE analysis of AP VoteCast Survey · Created with Datawrapper

Political researcher John Della Volpe, who co-founded the “Speaking with American Men Project,” says many young men see Democrats as weak and out of touch. He attributes Donald Trump’s gains among this group more to personality than policy.

Young men largely feel betrayed by institutions, Della Volpe said. That feeling started during the pandemic and has been coupled with economic anxiety.

“It is deeply frustrating that so many young men still feel the same thing to this day,” Moore said.



Maryland Gov. Wes Moore at the Inauguration of Prince George's County Executive Aisha Braveboy, says he is trying to attract more young men to the party. (Kim Hairston/Staff)

A new model?

In his February State of the State address, Moore highlighted rising incarceration and suicide rates among young men, along with declining college enrollment and workforce participation. He asked state agencies to propose targeted solutions — such as promoting entrepreneurship, homeownership and job reintegration after prison.

These efforts build on earlier initiatives like mentorship programs, funding for county summer programs, a paid **service year** for high school graduates and mass pardons for low-level cannabis offenses.

“It’s not an election strategy for us,” Moore said. “It’s something we believe in.”

Sen. Cory McCray, a Baltimore Democrat, praised Moore’s job training efforts as a way to give young men “exposure and access” to role models and tools for success.

But Republicans remain skeptical.

“A lot of things ... with this administration, sounded real good,” said Senate Minority Whip Justin Ready. But he said he hasn’t seen “a lot of action” or concrete results.

Ready said many of the policies Moore touts don’t specifically target young men. Senate Minority Leader Steve Hershey added that Moore’s “priorities seem to shift with political headlines,” and said Marylanders deserve consistent, comprehensive leadership.

Moore also faced pushback from Democrats who have not been universally supportive of some of the governor’s recent actions, including policies they say could impact young men in the state. The governor recently **vetoed a bill** that would have created a commission to study reparations for descendants of enslaved people. Moore said he wanted policies that deliver results — not “another study.”

Is it working?

Moore has positioned himself as a results-oriented leader, often distancing himself from what he calls “needless debate,” which has helped people see him as a doer and addresses a common desire among younger people to change the status quo, Washington College associate professor Flavio Hickel said. In a speech in South Carolina this year, Moore called on his party to stop being the party of “no and slow.”

About 53% of 18- to 34-year-olds and 53% of men in Maryland approve of the job he’s doing, according to a March Gonzales Poll, the most recent one available.

Moore’s life story — which he describes as growing up in an over-policed neighborhood, serving in the military, leading an anti-poverty organization and becoming Maryland’s first Black governor — has also become part of his messaging pitch to young men.

“We hold him up as an icon of what can be done, showing these young men that there is a place in our coalition for them,” said Ilyse Hogue, co-founder of the American Men Project.

A party leader in a traditional early primary state agrees. “He worked very hard for everything that he got,” said New Hampshire Democratic Party Chair Raymond Buckley. “I think that connects with a lot of young folks that are going through some pretty anxious times.”

2028 and beyond

Although Moore told The Sun he is **not running** for president in 2028, he's held meetings with former Biden and Obama campaign advisors in **South Carolina** — a key primary state — and his name has appeared in early polls of potential Democratic contenders.

Nationally, Democrats are testing new approaches to reach young men online. The party recently launched a podcast and has eased its social media tone. But Wathum-Ocama, the Young Democrats of America president, said Democrats need more than a “magic bullet.” He described a party that needs authenticity.



Ruben Amaya is the president of Young Democrats of Maryland. (Kenneth K. Lam/Staff)

Ruben Amaya, president of the Young Democrats of Maryland and the third vice chair of the state party, said including young people in party messaging is critical. At age 21, Moore nominated him for state party leadership. Amaya, who's now 24, took the nomination as a symbol that Moore values young voices.

“Our jobs are not to be pundits,” Moore said about fellow politicians. “Your job is to actually care about the work, your job is to actually care about the people that you’re hoping to serve.”

Have a news tip? Contact Katharine Wilson at kwilson@baltsun.com.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE

A Texas teen was the victim of fake AI nudes. Now a new law requires platforms to remove such content.

A high school victim was one of the victims, but she and her mother fought back, with the help of Senator Ted Cruz.

BY KATHARINE WILSON

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Elliston Berry of Aledo, Texas, (left, in white) looks on as President Donald Trump signs the Take It Down Act into law at the White House. Berry advocated for stronger legal protections after she became the victim of fake digital photos. © REUTERS/Kevin Lamarque

Elliston Berry, then 14 years old, woke up on the morning of October 2, 2023 in her hometown of Aledo, Texas, to frantic texts from a friend. Innocent photos of Berry and two of her friends from their social media accounts had been edited using artificial intelligence to make them appear nude.

Within a day, edited photos of a total of nine girls at her Aledo high school were being shared around the school.

Berry and her mother, Anna McAdams, turned this incident into advocacy for a measure signed into law on Monday by President Donald Trump to protect future victims of AI-generated intimate images and non-consensual posting of intimate images.

The bipartisan law, led by Sen. Ted Cruz, R-Texas, and labeled the Take It Down Act, tackles the distribution of revenge pornography and deep fakes — digitally altered images — shared without consent.

“It represents movement, it represents justice, and it represents that even a normal person, just a normal person from Texas, has a voice,” Berry, now 16, said in an interview with The Texas Tribune.

The law makes non-consensual posting or threats to post real, fake or altered “intimate visual depictions” online a federal crime. Posting such depictions could lead to fines and sentences of up to two years for posting depictions of adults and up to three years in prison for posting images of minors.

The law also requires that within the next year online platforms make a system where victims or people on their behalf can report such images. Once reported, the platforms must remove the images within 48 hours.

“It should not take a sitting U.S. senator making a phone call on your behalf to get pictures like that taken down,” Cruz said in an interview. “Any victim should have a right to say that is me, you do not have my permission, take it down.”

In Berry’s case, a fellow high school student made Snapchat accounts, requested to follow other students at the school, and, if a connection was accepted, sent the false depictions of Berry and her friends.

“As a parent, you prepare to protect your child. We never saw this coming,” McAdams said. “It was so devastating.”

The school was able to identify the student within a week, McAdams said, but they did not tell girls or their families who was responsible because the perpetrator was a minor.

In December 2023, McAdams began reaching out to the offices of state representatives and Sen. Ted Cruz. Texas state Senator Phil King, R-Weatherford, contacted the family, and has worked with them on state legislation around deep fake regulation.

King's bill is being considered by the state Legislature, which is separately considering a bill to ban minors from social media.

In April 2024, Cruz's office responded to McAdams and later flew her to Washington to talk with the Senator about a possible bill regarding AI deepfake regulation. Berry later joined her to promote the legislation on Capitol Hill and to media outlets in Washington and New York.

"Elliston was the impetus for this bill, but sadly, we are seeing women and teenage girls being targeted over and over again," Cruz said.

Many states have laws banning revenge pornography — nude images shared without consent of the person pictured — but many of these laws don't address AI falsified images.

This law aims at that gap and places a duty on social media companies to regulate the content of their platforms and remove harmful content when notified.

The Snapchat accounts that targeted Berry weren't taken down, Cruz and McAdams said, until after the family met with Cruz and he directed staff to contact the company — months after McAdams and the other victim's families first attempted to contact the platform.

"This makes sure that they have to respond," McAdams said.

At first, McAdams said that Berry wasn't sure about speaking out about what had happened to her. But after her first speaking event at a news conference introducing the legislation, Berry turned to her mother and said "Mom, I can do this," McAdams recalled.

“He really gave Elliston her voice back,” McAdams said about Cruz. “It really has been a healing process for her.”

Berry appeared on major networks over the past year advocating for the bill, appeared with First Lady Melania Trump and Cruz at a Capitol Hill roundtable ahead of Trump’s joint address to Congress, and attended the address as one of the first lady’s official guests.

The first lady has been an outspoken advocate for the act as a part of her “Be Best” anti-cyber bullying initiative.

The bill passed the Senate unanimously in February and the House of Representatives, with only two opposing votes, at the end of April. Major companies — including Meta, Google, TikTok, and Snap (the company that owns Snapchat) — endorsed the legislation.

The two lawmakers who voted against the bill were Republican Reps. Thomas Massie, Kentucky, and Eric Burlison, Missouri, who both argued the bill could lead to censorship. Massie wrote that the law could be a “slippery slope,” and “ripe for abuse,” on X.

Some advocacy groups have criticized the bill for vagueness and have worried that the law does not allow enough time for platforms to properly go through removal requests, potentially leading to legal content being taken down.

Cruz dismissed free speech concerns and said that the bill does not remotely revolve around free speech, adding “You can say anything you like, but you don’t have a right to harm the rights of others.”

Berry and her mom were both in the White House Rose Garden during the Monday bill signing where the president and first lady highlighted Berry’s advocacy.

“Elliston Berry stood boldly for change, despite the risk posed to her and her family,” Melania Trump said. “By speaking out and making her voice heard Elliston, your voice and the voices of so many like you, made this bill a national priority.”

Now, Berry and McAdams are focusing on their next policy push: adding lessons about AI into high school curriculums.

The pair said they want to add instructions on what AI crime is, what deepfakes are, and what can be done to support victims. This work for AI education they hope will be done on a nationwide level, but Berry and McAdams have started to advocate for this on the state and school-district level.

Aledo Independent School District, the district Berry attended during the incident, said in a statement that the district “fully supports changes in federal and state law that would better address uses of AI that harm children and supports parent and student education about the dangers of AI.”

While in Washington, McAdams said she is hoping to meet with administration officials about getting this curriculum implemented nationwide.

Berry said she believes if her school had this kind of education, that her photos never would have been edited and if they were, her school and herself would have been more prepared.

“School is supposed to be our safe place,” Berry said. “It’s where we go to learn, get our education. Yet, there’s so many cases around the world that people are not even wanting to go to class because they’re being tormented on social media.”

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NEWS > POLITICS

Maryland Supreme Court appears wary of case against fossil fuel companies



By **KATHARINE WILSON**

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[Maryland Supreme Court](#) justices on Monday morning appeared wary of local jurisdictions' argument that oil companies should pay damages for climate change allegedly caused by the companies' alleged deceptive marketing.

The lawyer representing Baltimore City, Annapolis and Anne Arundel County was pressed at the hearing by justices to describe the alleged deceitful actions by the oil companies and explain how changes to the marketing could have sufficiently decreased the local impact of climate change, without arguing issues that are a matter of federal regulatory standards.

"You do in your complaints identify concealment and misrepresentation, but it's often wrapped up in allegations that are, it seems to me, separate from that," Chief Justice Matthew Fader said, while questioning the lawyer for the cities and county.

The jurisdictions each separately sued fossil fuel companies, starting in 2018, over the impact greenhouse gas emissions have had on their communities. Lower-court judges dismissed all three cases within the past two years.

The cities and county are jointly asking the Maryland State Supreme Court to overturn those dismissals. The court was asked to decide whether state law can apply to requests for financial compensation for damages caused by out-of-state greenhouse gas emissions.

If the cases go to trial, the jurisdictions are pushing for clearer product warnings by the companies related to their influence on climate change and payments, so jurisdictions can address the local impacts of climate change.

The lawsuits are part of a movement involving 35 states and municipalities that have sued fossil fuel companies over the local impact of greenhouse gas emissions. Only two other State Supreme Courts have considered such cases, in Hawaii and Colorado, both of which sided with the cities suing the fossil fuel companies. The Trump administration has been working alongside the oil industry to push against this type of litigation and

legislation, according to reporting from [The New York Times](#), including opposing a bill in New York that would have required oil companies to pay for projects to protect from damages caused by climate change.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency identifies greenhouse gases produced by human activity as the most significant driver of rising global temperatures and climate change since the mid-20th century. Global temperatures have been increasing faster than typical since at least 1982, according to the U.S. National Oceanic Administration, and 2024 was the warmest year since temperature records began in 1850.

The residents of the county and cities have and will continue, their lawyers wrote in briefs, to “suffer severe harm” caused by greenhouse gas emissions, including flooding, extreme heat and sea-level rise.

The lawyer for the fossil fuel companies sued by the jurisdictions — which include major corporations Chevron, BP, Shell, Exxon and Marathon Oil — argued that the case presented by the cities and county is a matter of federal law and regulation beyond the state’s jurisdiction. The attorney representing the companies, Theodore Boutrous, said the damages sought by the cities and county would effectively regulate the companies internationally and could impact global customers because of the financial damages sought by the cities and county.

“They’re using the lawsuit to try to change market forces to reduce emissions. They’re using the force of law, state law, to try to reduce emissions below levels that the EPA has found are acceptable,” Boutrous said. “We’re talking about a product that is essential to running our lives, to national security, to our economy.”

Boutrous added that while the cities are not directly asking to regulate the emissions of the sued companies, a ruling in favor of the cities and county could alter the global marketplace and spread state law beyond its intended scope, calling the warning requirement sought by the jurisdictions “a breathtakingly broad duty.”

The lawyer representing the cities and county, Victor Sher, argued that the companies have waged a “campaign of disinformation” and failed to warn customers about the possible impact of their products.

“These cases are causally tethered to that deception,” Sher said. “Our burden [in court] will be to show that the deception and the failure to warn made a difference, and the case is entirely about that difference in these communities. It’s not about climate change writ large.”

While questioning Sher’s argument, justices emphasized a lack of specific examples of deception by the companies; limited sense of the impact better warning customers in Maryland would have had on local climate change impacts; and the global scope of the companies and the changing climate. Justice Steven Gould questioned the assumption that Maryland consumers were unaware of the effects of greenhouse gases, noting that the information has been available in the public sphere for decades.

At trial, if allowed to proceed by the Maryland Supreme Court, Sher said the jurisdictions’ counsel would present evidence that the companies knew the harm their products could cause and denied that information to the public. Sher argued that the companies initially publicly denied their impact on the environment and later engaged in “greenwashing,” a marketing tactic in which companies attempt to appear more environmentally friendly.

More notification to Maryland customers about the risk of greenhouse gases would have prevented only “some portion” of the impact of climate change in Maryland, Sher argued. There is no reason why, Sher said, companies can’t adhere to both federal emission regulations, like the Clean Air Act, and comply with issuing climate-centered warnings.

The justices also questioned Boutrous’ argument, pointing out that the municipalities are not seeking regulation of production, as Boutrous argued that the Clean Air Act

prevents states from regulating out-of-state greenhouse gas emissions. Justice Brynja Booth questioned Boutrous' argument by asking the lawyer if the problems he foresees are a result of market forces course-correcting, how the lawsuit could violate the prioritization of federal regulations, and pointed out the two other state Supreme Courts that ruled against the oil companies.

The lawsuits, Boutrous argued, would effectively regulate emissions by imposing financial burdens on the companies, overriding the federal standards.

As the third state supreme court to hear this case, the Maryland court's ruling might help set a precedent for state and city-run climate change litigation across the country. Lawyers for ExxonMobil and Suncor asked the U.S. Supreme Court this year to review the decision by Colorado's highest court in favor of Boulder's case against the oil companies.

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