

To: Chairman Smith, Vice-Chairman Waldstreicher, and Honorable Members of the Senate
Judicial Proceedings Committee
From: Zyshawn Bryan
Date: February 11, 2020
Re: Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 314

Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman, Mr. Vice-Chair, and honorable members of the Committee. My name is Zyshawn Bryan, and I am here in support of Senate Bill 314.

When I was 17, I was charged as an adult. I was brought to Baltimore's adult jail for a whole week, and then I was moved to BCJJC [Baltimore City Juvenile Justice Center]. I stayed at BCJJC from May to October 2017, waiting for my transfer hearing. I had my transfer hearing in October, and the judge decided to transfer me down to the juvenile system. She told me I would go to placement at Silver Oak Academy for 12 – 18 months.

At placement, I was totally focused on one thing: going home, and never getting sent back again. I learned a lot of skills there: how to get a job, how to be responsible, and how to be humble. It was pretty humbling, having to work really hard to earn things I wanted, like going off campus for a few hours or getting a home pass for the weekend. But I had a drive in me: I wanted to go home, and I wanted to make my mother proud. The best part was helping other kids at the placement earn those things too. I told them to stay focused, just stay focused on going home.

When I earned the right to go off campus, I got my first job working nearby at Chipotle. Seven months after I got there, I had enough credits to graduate from Silver Oak with my high school diploma. My mother came to the graduation. She was really proud of me.

They say when we're transferred to the juvenile system, our records will disappear. But that's not true. My case was picked up by the media right after I was charged. I found out about it right after I was booked at the adult jail, when I called my mother and she told me I was on the news. She was crying. The way she talked about it, they were showing it like I had killed someone, showing my mug shot and everything. It made me angry. I was a juvenile!

I thought it would go away when my case was moved to the juvenile system, but it didn't. I had to use the computer to take some pre-tests right when I got to Silver Oak, so I Googled myself. Then I saw it too. It's still there. It will never go away. It doesn't matter if my background check comes up clean; as soon as somebody looks my name up, BOOM. They're going to know.

Since I got home from placement, I've been doing really good. I'm an opportunity person, so I've done every program I can do. I go to work every day from 6:30 AM to 2:30 PM, and on Tuesdays and Thursdays, I stay late for apprenticeship classes. At CLIA, I'm learning how to be a public speaker and spokesperson for youth who've been through what I've been through. I'm on the right path. But for the rest of my life, for people who don't know me, I'll be the way the media showed me. People find out about it and say, "Don't be around him. He's crazy or something." They ask me all these questions. That's really hard for me when I'm just trying to move forward. I don't want the next kid to go through that. I don't want to have to tell them, "That job isn't going to call you back." We can't hold them hostage. We're crushing their futures.

That's my story. Think about my story, and please support Senate Bill SB0314 .