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**Written Testimony Submitted for the Record to the  
Maryland House of Delegates (Judiciary Committee)  
For the Hearing on Juvenile Law – Child Interrogation Protection Act (HB 624)**

**February 13, 2020**

**SUPPORT**

As a Community Advocate residing in Harford County and also a congregant of the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Harford County, I submit testimony in strong support of House Bill 624 – Juvenile Law – Child Interrogation Protection Act (“HB 624”) because of its inherent outcome to improve public safety.

The purpose of House Bill 624 is to help ensure that minors are protected while exercising their rights while in police custody. This bill’s requirement to have law enforcement give notice to parents regarding a child’s location, reason for being taken into custody and instruction to the parent, guardian or custodian on how to make immediate in-person contact with the child makes law enforcement more accountable to the public and improves relationship with the community by promoting communications between law enforcement and parents in the **beginning** of an arrest.

Furthermore, the bill’s requirement to establish age-appropriate language to advise of child of his or her rights will fundamentally cut down on erroneous reporting. Research demonstrates that when in police custody, many juveniles do not fully understand or appreciate their rights, options, or alternatives. And, while in the pursuit of public safety, it would be judicious to use credible reports during any investigation and interrogation. Accordingly, House Bill 624 supports the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry belief that juveniles should have an attorney present during questioning by police or other law enforcement agencies.

While the emphasis of this bill is to protect youth and have them exercise their rights for the purpose of avoiding incarcerations based on false testimonies and other aspects of society that make them vulnerable to such an outcome, the true essence of this bill is about public safety. Everyone wants to be safe inside and outside of their homes. Appeasing the public with a rush to judgement without obtaining the relevant facts in a case not only weakens the case but makes law enforcement susceptible to criticism that strips them of the respect many officers deserve.

I argue that this bill protects them and their reputation as well. Slowing down the interrogation process is key to getting the facts and establishing as well as enforcing the rights of minors is a step in the right direction to apprehending the guilty parties and strengthening public safety in our state. The public is long tired of ruining the lives of innocent youth just to be vindicated several years later of a crime they never committed.

As a Unitarian Universalist, I believe in the inherent worth and dignity of every person and our Maryland children a worth too much to simply disregard for the sake of expediency. It is for these reasons that I ask for a favorable vote for HB 624.

Sincerely,

Marla Posey-Moss  
Community Advocate