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THINK JEWISHLY. ACT LOCALLY.

TESTIMONY ON HB84/SBI 19 - POSITION: FAVORABLE

Education – Crimes on School Grounds – Application

TO: Chair Atterbeary, Vice Chair Washington, and members of the Ways and Means Committee

FROM: Jo Shifrin, on behalf of Jews United for Justice (JUFJ)

My name is Jo Shifrin. I am a resident of District 16. I am submitting this testimony on behalf of Jews United for Justice in support of HB84/SBI 19, Crimes on School Grounds. JUFJ organizes 6,000 Jews and allies from across Maryland in support of local social, racial, and economic justice campaigns.

Judaism views childhood as a period of beauty and joy to be valued. Judaism also recognizes that a child doesn't have the cognitive ability to fully distinguish good from evil, (Deuteronomy 11 v.18). This reflects what we now know scientifically about child development. Additionally, Judaism recognizes that the wellbeing of society is determined by our treatment of children.

In 1960, my parents divorced, making me the first kid I knew from a "broken home." It was a very unsettling time for me and I engaged in some behavior 60 years ago that under existing Maryland law, could have led to me being charged with a misdemeanor for disrupting school. I believe the only reason I was not adjudicated as a delinquent was that I was white. In fact, 82% of youth referred to the Department of Juvenile Services for school disruption were children of color. Passing HB84 is a racial justice imperative.

I firmly believe that children who act out, disobey adults, or break school rules are trying to figure out who they are, taking risks to assess social, personal, and familial boundaries. As children develop, they are subject to impulsivity and are susceptible to peer pressure. Their normal developmental behavior is better addressed by counseling than by being treated as a criminal. It is time to treat children in a way that reflects that they are our best hope for the future.

On behalf of Jews United for Justice, I respectfully urge this committee to return a favorable report on HB84.