

Senate Bill 93
Juvenile Court – Jurisdiction (Youth Equity & Safety Act)
Ending Automatic Charging of Youth as Adults
February 16, 2023
Support/Favorable

Dear Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee,

My name is Amy Ruddle and I am a resident of District 20. I am a small business owner, attend Temple Emanuel synagogue, and am a volunteer and advocate with NAMI Montgomery County. Today, I am submitting this testimony in support of SB93, the Youth Equity and Safety Act, which would make our communities safer and make our youth justice system more equitable by ensuring that all juveniles begin their cases in the juvenile court system.

Maryland sends more young people per capita to adult court based on offense type than any other state except for Alabama.¹ A major reason is that Maryland law requires some children to be automatically prosecuted in adult court for 33 offenses, a practice that puts us out of step with 26 other states and the international human rights law. When young people – some as young as 14 – are automatically charged in adult court, they are more likely to reoffend, sooner, with more violent crime than children who are charged in juvenile court. This practice undermines the purpose of the juvenile court system, pursues punishment rather than rehabilitation, and makes our communities less safe. Furthermore, laws that allow youth to be tried in adult court reflect and reinforce the racial inequities that characterize the justice system in the United States.

I support the Youth Equity and Safety Act because I believe that kids should be treated like kids and should not automatically be charged as adults and processed through the adult criminal justice system. Moreover, it is known that youth of color are overrepresented at every stage of the Maryland court system², and they are more likely to receive harsher sentences than white youth charged with similar crimes³. Ceasing the punitive practice of auto-charging youths as adults would help remedy the racial inequities that characterize the United States criminal justice system. Maryland should join the 26 other states who have passed laws to **treat kids like kids and end automatic charging**.

I respectfully urge this committee to return a favorable report on SB93.

¹ <http://dls.maryland.gov/pubs/prod/NoPbITabMtg/CmsnJuvRefCncl/Sentencing-Project-National-Trends-in-Charging-Children.pdf>

² Hagan J, Shedd C, Payne MR. Race, ethnicity, and youth perceptions of criminal injustice. *American Sociological Review*. 2005;70(3):381-407. See also, *DJS Data Resource Guide FY2021*, 241. https://djs.maryland.gov/Documents/DRG/Data_Resource_Guide_FY2021.pdf.

³ Soler M. Health issues for adolescents in the justice system. *Journal of Adolescent Health*. 2002;31(6):321–333.