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TESTIMONY ON SB93 - POSITION: FAVORABLE
Juvenile Court – Jurisdiction

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

FROM: Ioana Stoica

My name is Ioana Stoica and I am a resident of District 21. I am submitting this testimony in support of SB93: Juvenile Court Jurisdiction.

I write to you as a constituent, as an immigrant, and as a member of Oseh Shalom, a reconstructionist synagogue in Laurel, MD. My faith and my background both form the foundation for my beliefs that seeking justice is the most important task that we as individuals, and collectively as a society, must pursue. The Jewish concept of justice has been central to our religious traditions and arises from our historical experiences - in my immediate personal case, of being a refugee from a formerly communist country, not to mention being raised in such a place.

My upbringing has led me into professions of service; while I currently work in public policy advocacy, prior to this, I taught in public schools for almost two decades. I taught in a Title I high school for much of this period that served a population that was over 90% black. During this time, I sat in too many meetings in which I had to advocate for clearly kind, intelligent students who had made mistakes, to receive lesser punishments than those proposed by administration, such as expulsions. It is our responsibility as adults to guide and teach children, and automatically labeling them as “bad” and meting out consequences we would mete to adults does not serve this purpose.

The school to prison pipeline has been written about at length; as the ACLU has pointed out, when policies about the liberty of our youth are based on perceived risks to public safety, instead of on the well-being of the youth involved, everyone suffers the consequences. Kids are more likely to reoffend and to enter a cycle of criminalization and poverty; families are torn apart; black kids are targeted at much higher rates than others; and, critically, public safety does not improve.

In my decades of teaching, I have *never* worked with a student who was lashing out or who made mistakes because they were “bad” - rather, these were kids who were not being heard, or who had been neglected by a school and community that did not understand or care to address their needs. As an educator, I firmly believe that every child that we send off to adult court or whom we incarcerate is OUR failure: not theirs. It is OUR responsibility to teach and care for these children. And we can begin by ending the racist practice of automatically charging kids as adults. **I passionately urge this committee to return a favorable report on SB93.**