

Date of Hearing: February 16, 2023

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TESTIMONY ON SB0093 - POSITION: FAVORABLE
Juvenile Court – Jurisdiction (Youth Equity & Safety Act)

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

FROM: Charles M. Koplik

My name is Charles M. Koplik. I am a resident of District 21. I am submitting this testimony in support of SB0093, Youth Equity & Safety Act.

I am a member of the Jewish Community Relations Council (JCRC) and chair its Anti-Racism Team. In addition, I serve as Executive Vice President of the Jewish Federation of Howard County. In my life, I am guided by the Jewish concept of *tzelem elohim*, which teaches that all people are created in the Divine image, with inherent and equal dignity and value. All people should be treated with dignity, respect, and fairness.

However, Maryland's practice of charging children as adults doesn't reflect this concept - in fact its application reflects deep racial inequity - 81% of the youth charged in adult court in our state are Black. Current law requires youth as young as 14 to be automatically prosecuted in adult court for 33 different offenses. In 2021, Maryland sent more kids to adult court than California, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, and Arizona combined!

Charging kids as adults leads to significantly higher recidivism. Ending this practice would reduce not only violent crime, but also the criminalization and incarceration of Black youth, who are disproportionately targeted by our justice system.

We can and must treat our youth better. Maryland should join the 26 other states who have ended the racist practice of automatically charging youth as adults.

I respectfully urge this committee to return a favorable report on SB0093.