



THE EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF MARYLAND

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 0093:

Juvenile Court – Jurisdiction

****FAVORABLE****

TO: Sen. William C. Smith, Jr., Chair, Sen. Jeff Waldstreicher, Vice Chair and the members of the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

FROM: Rev. Kenneth O. Phelps, Jr., Co-Chair, Maryland Episcopal Public Policy Network, Diocese of Maryland

DATE: February 16, 2023

The Episcopal Church, at its 78th Convention in 2015, passed sweeping resolutions aimed at ending mass incarceration practices and mitigating solutions for the damages inflicted upon certain populations and communities by both arrest and sentencing policies and practices. The Episcopal Church at large and the Diocese of Maryland in particular has embraced the concept of reparations, a concept not limited to financial considerations but to a leveling of the playing field across a broad spectrum of issues, including criminal justice.

81% of youth charged in adult court in Maryland are Black. Black youth are more likely to be sent to adult prison and receive longer sentences than their white counterparts for similar offenses. And implicit bias research shows that Black kids are more likely to be seen and treated as adults than white kids.

This bill changes the way teens charged with serious felonies enter the justice system. Currently teens charged with any of 33 offenses are arrested and automatically charged as if they were adults, in criminal court. SB 0093 establishes that all youth under age 18 begin their cases in juvenile court.

Youth charged in adult court are less likely to receive rehabilitative services, which makes them more likely to reoffend than similarly situated youth charged in juvenile court. Research overwhelmingly shows that charging kids as adults does not improve public safety. According to the U.S. Department of Justice –”To best achieve reductions in recidivism, the overall number of juvenile offenders transferred to the criminal justice system should be minimized.”



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Adult charging results in increased physical violence, sexual violence, and isolation. Research shows that youth charged as adults are at increased risk of physical and sexual assault and isolation from their families, which may contribute to future criminality. This bill protects kids and preserves families.

The Diocese of Maryland requests a favorable report.