



**TESTIMONY TO THE HOUSE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE**

**HB 698 – Juvenile Law – Juvenile Court Jurisdiction – Age of Child**

**POSITION: Oppose**

**BY: Nancy Soreng, President**

**Date: March 2, 2023**

The League of Women Voters of Maryland supports the use of specialized judges, counseling services, individually designed training and treatment programs, and local or regional diagnostic services for juvenile offenders. Numerous studies have documented that human brains are in development until young adulthood and, accordingly, children and youth are less able to appreciate the consequences of their conduct. Also, a minor's capacity to understand legal terminology and procedures when treated as an adult makes them extremely vulnerable within the system. Juvenile courts have procedures adapted to deal with youth as well as the authority and resources to craft sentences appropriate to the individual offender.

HB 698 would limit the jurisdiction of the juvenile court, depriving a large group of children access to the court that is best equipped to address the circumstances that led to the offense. Rather than providing protection against crime, the bill would force more cases into adult proceedings where the court will lack convenient access to the procedures and services that would be most effective in addressing juvenile offenders.

Rather than restricting the juvenile court, the General Assembly should work with the Governor to ensure that juvenile justice services are adequately funded so that services tailored to the needs of juveniles are available as needed by the juvenile courts.

We urge an unfavorable report on HB 698.