

SB 052_Jo Shifrin_UNFAV

Date of Hearing: February 13, 2024

Jo Shifrin

Bethesda, MD 20817

TESTIMONY ON SB 052 - POSITION: UNFAVORABLE

Juvenile Justice Restoration Act of 2024

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

FROM: Jo Shifrin

My name is Jo Shifrin. I am a resident of District 16. I am submitting this testimony against SB 052, Juvenile Justice Restoration Act of 2024. I am a Jewish retiree, and a Bethesda resident for the last 10 years. Jewish values hold that all of us deserve a life with dignity, respect, and safety. Jewish tradition also teaches that in a just world, all people would have what the *Torah* calls *dey machsoro*, resources sufficient for their needs. Our tradition also teaches that the divine encompasses both justice and mercy. It is unfortunate that some lawmakers promote fear that scapegoats Black and brown children.

In 2022, Maryland passed the Juvenile Justice Restoration Act, which made tremendous progress in how the state treats juveniles who come in contact with the juvenile justice system. But the proposed legislation undermines several provisions of that law and ignores more than 20 years of data, research, and experience on the most effective way to hold children accountable for their actions and improve the safety of our communities.

Real safety comes from solutions that prevent crime from occurring in the first place. Policy makers should fully fund things that are proven to create safe communities and improve people's quality of life, like child care, good schools, training programs and internships, community service, treatment for mental health and substance abuse, community-led gun violence prevention and gun violence interruption programs, and affordable and stable housing.

Moreover, the Department of Juvenile Services should be fully funded to enable more children to access diversion. Diversion refers to community programs, like some of those listed above, in lieu of spending time in jail. Diversion can prevent recidivism, because the child spends his or her time in the community, supported by family and friends, and not in a prison, subject to physical and emotional harm, where they would be more likely to be arrested for new offenses. Before the Juvenile Justice Restoration Act was passed in 2022, the rate of recidivism among children under age 13 was 32.1%; after it was passed, the rate dropped to 11.1%.

I respectfully urge this committee to return an unfavorable report on SB 052.