



VISION - *BRIDGE Maryland sees the state challenged by a history of inequity but engaged in community organizing for a more just tomorrow.*

MISSION - *BRIDGE Maryland uses intentional relationship building, organizing, and intensive leadership development in order to strengthen congregations and faith leaders to demonstrate and advance justice in the world.*

HB 445

**MINORS CONVICTED AS ADULTS - SENTENCING - TRANSFER TO JUVENILE COURT
FAVORABLE**

Dear Chair Clippinger, Vice Chair Bartlett, and members of the Judiciary Committee,

BRIDGE Maryland, Inc. supports HB445 as written, and asks for a favorable report. BRIDGE Maryland, Inc. is an interfaith organization with laity and religious leaders who identify and address community issues by building power to pursue equity and opportunity for all Marylanders. We support HB 445 because, if signed into law, the bill will ensure that judges have additional discretion to end the unjust practice of sentencing child victims of sex crimes and human trafficking to lengthy prison terms for crimes they commit against their abusers. Instead of locking exploited and abused children away in cages, these children will be treated the way that child victims deserve – with care, compassion, and empathy.

The science and studies on sex abuse, trafficking, and trauma¹ are disturbing and with a favorable vote, you can give our children the service and care they need as they wrestle with the death they have caused. A commonly misinterpreted commandment is “Thou shall not kill.” However, a better interpretation is “thou shall not murder” which means that the perpetrator plotted to take the life of someone whom they deemed needed to die. However, when defending yourself from an attacker and as a result your attacker is killed, the commandment would not pertain because the preservation of life was the primary intent.

Children who commit crimes against their abusers are especially deserving of our support and empathy. They are categorically different than other types of offenders in the criminal legal system. Today we ask that you recognize these children as victims and give judges the flexibility to fashion an outcome that is more just and compassionate. These children deserve better. And we owe it to them to be better. As you consider this measure, I’d like you to ask yourself what if these children were your

son or daughter? What would you want done in cases like theirs?

Children are our most vulnerable gifts to humanity, and you can show them that an unintended death will be addressed with mental support to deal with their already traumatized brains. Thus, **it is for these reasons that we strongly encourage this committee to issue a favorable report on HB 445** to ensure child status is fully considered at sentencing and give judges greater flexibility in cases where child victims commit crimes against their abusers. Thank you for your favorable report.

Respectfully,

Marlon Tilghman

Rev. Dr. Marlon Tilghman
Criminal Justice Task Force, Co-Chair
BRIDGE Maryland, Inc.
Parent, Grandparent, Mentor, Pastor

ⁱ In the United States, Child Protective Services estimates that 63,000 children are sexually abused each year. In the U.S., 1 in 9 girls and 1 in 53 boys under the age of 18 experience sexual abuse or assault at the hands of an adult, 93% of which are committed by an individual that the child knows. Children who are victims of sexual assault are four times more likely to become addicted to drugs, four times as likely to experience Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, and three times more likely to experience a major depressive episode.

In 2015, the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children estimated that 1 in 6 endangered runaways are likely child sex trafficking victims and that approximately 100,000 U.S. children are sexually exploited every year. Child victims of sex trafficking are often subjected to physical and sexual abuse by their traffickers and the “johns” or “buyers” that exploit and rape them.