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WRITTEN TESTIMONY
SB323: Juvenile Court - Jurisdiction (Youth Charging Reform Act)
Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
February 4, 2026
SUPPORT

Background: Senate Bill 323 would alter the jurisdiction of the juvenile and adult court systems by raising the age children would be tried as adults from 14 to 16, unless they are charged with serious violent crimes that would be punishable by life imprisonment. ***This bill does not preclude children to be tried as adults, it only precludes them from automatically beginning their legal process in adult court for certain criminal charges.***

Written Comments: The Baltimore Jewish Council (BJC) represents the Associated Jewish Federation of Baltimore and all its agencies, and programs, as well as the organized Jewish Community of Baltimore.

Maryland sends more youth to adult court than any other state besides Alabama. Children who start in the adult system are more likely to regress and engage in more violent crimes. Further, choosing to charge these individuals as adults highlights large racial disparities, where over 80% of children charged as adults are Black. Unfortunately, those children are much more likely to receive longer sentences in adult prison than White children.

Services and treatment that are offered in juvenile facilities are evidence-based and preventative. By starting these cases in juvenile court, we not only save the state money and time, but also create better outcomes for these children.

The Baltimore Jewish Council believes that children are society's most vital future resources, yet one of its most vulnerable classes. When our youth are charged with crimes, great care should be taken to ensure that the justice system provides them with fair opportunities for growth. The mandatory charges of children as adults should be avoided at all costs.

As a proud member of the Maryland Youth Justice Coalition, we ask for a favorable report on SB323.

The Baltimore Jewish Council, a coalition of central Maryland Jewish organizations and congregations, advocates at all levels of government, on a variety of social welfare, economic and religious concerns, to protect and promote the interests of the Associated Jewish Community Federation of Baltimore, its agencies and the Greater Baltimore Jewish community.