

Hearing: February 4, 2026
Claire Landers
Baltimore, MD, 21209

SB323_ClaireLanders_FAV
Juvenile Court - Jurisdiction (Youth Charging Reform Act)
Ending Automatic Charging of Youth as Adults

TO: Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and Members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee
FROM: Claire Landers, Baltimore County resident

I am a parent residing in Baltimore County, District 11, and I strongly urge you to support SB323. .

A couple of years ago **I viewed a video of a very young Black child being held alone in an adult detention facility in Baltimore County**, supposedly because space in a more appropriate setting was unavailable. **This boy was distraught, crying and begging his attorney to take him home. It was disturbing and heartrending to watch a recording of a child's helpless anguish in a facility he should never have experienced.** Witnessing such an incident as this, occurring a mere 10 minutes drive from my own child's home, stirs my conscience to plead with members of this committee to support SB323 to end the practice of automatically charging children and young teenagers as adults for certain offenses in Maryland.

No matter the offense attributed to a minor in custody, any and every young person should be availed of rigorous professional assessment(s) and impartial judicial hearing(s) in juvenile court before facing the full, enormous weight of prosecution as an adult for those offenses.

I'm certain you will hear and read other testimony from experts providing documented evidence and data for the many ways autocharging harms young human beings. Autocharging a) damages children and teens, particularly Maryland's Black young people, and impacts them forward into their adult lives, b) how autocharging young people super-charges recidivism - thus, negatively impacting society in the long term as well, and c) that autocharging places Maryland squarely in the company of other US states more notoriously recognized for their own historically racist practices around prosecution and incarceration of Black people in America. That hard, documented evidence along should be enough to persuade you on the merits of SB323.

But writing as a mother in Maryland, I want to put forth another consideration beyond data and politics: Autocharging children and teenagers is a draconian, Dickensian practice that does not benefit the best values Maryland ascribes to in 2026. Lawyers Mall plaza, fronting America's oldest state capitol building is graced by a sculpture of Black children seated in the towering

shadow of Justice Marshall. Maryland proudly asserts that Justice Marshall is “one of our own” and so it should follow in 2026 that our State Legislature demonstrates that Marshall’s legal legacy of protecting vulnerable Black children will still animate how our justice system will treat *all children in Maryland* going forward. Please issue a favorable report on SB323. Thank you.