

February 4, 2026

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TESTIMONY ON SB323 - POSITION: FAVORABLE
Juvenile Court - Jurisdiction (Youth Charging Reform Act)

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

FROM: Elisa Frost

My name is Elisa Frost. I am a resident of District 43. I am submitting this testimony in support of SB323, Juvenile Court - Jurisdiction (Youth Charging Reform Act). I am a daughter of Baltimore and a mother of Baltimoreans, a white woman and a Jew, and an educator of teenagers and young adults. I take issue with some fundamental truths of how we do things in Maryland. How can it be that we bypass juvenile court in large numbers of cases involving children? Are we not in agreement that our human young under the age of 18, however developed their bodies or however grave their mistakes, are not yet adults and should not be treated as such? By curbing the automatic charging of children as adults, SB323, if passed, will be a step in a better direction for the people of Maryland.

Charging children as adults makes them vulnerable to harm by putting them in dangerous, trauma-inducing situations based solely on charges of an alleged crime. This practice does not advance public safety, but rather clogs the judicial system and leads to a failure to offer the very social services and educational opportunities that can mitigate recidivism. Charging children as adults is a moral stain on the State of Maryland. Maryland is a statistical outlier, charging more children as adults per capita than any state in the Union but Alabama.

The juvenile justice system, though flawed, is designed to emphasize rehabilitation over punishment. When a child missteps, however egregiously, we owe it to the child not to discontinue care, but to provide the protection and resources needed for further growth. When a child missteps, however egregiously, we owe it to society not to withhold opportunities for that child to develop into an adult with the capacity to make positive contributions: to be a loving family member, a connected and connective community member, and an engaged and responsible citizen. When the State missteps by failing to see the children behind the charges, the State can take corrective measures. Maryland must end the practice of auto-charging children as adults. **I respectfully urge this committee to return a favorable report on SB323.**