

February 4, 2026

Deedee Jacobsohn
Rockville, MD 20852

TESTIMONY ON SB#0323 - POSITION: FAVORABLE
Juvenile Court - Jurisdiction (Youth Charging Reform Act)

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

FROM: Deedee Jacobsohn

My name is Deedee Jacobsohn. I am a resident of D16. I am submitting this testimony in support of SB# 323, the Youth Charging Reform Act.

I am a member of B'nai Israel Congregation where a group of teens in a "Mitzvah Corps" are learning about community organizing and social justice. They have chosen to focus on youth justice, specifically the Youth Charging Reform Act. I have been impressed by their passion, their conviction, and their willingness to engage with this work. Still, a shadow diminishes their exuberance as they talk of peers who do not share their freedom and opportunities.

The Torah uses many words to speak of youth, but one that is particularly relevant is "*na'ar*." *Na'ar* is used to describe a young person, distinct from someone who is a child, a "*katan*." Our tradition values the time between childhood and adulthood, and understands that while someone may no longer be a child, they may still act childishly or foolishly or even criminally because they are not fully grown up. Juvenile Court is grounded in this same recognition. Yet Maryland has persisted in charging youth as adults for dozens of crimes; compelling them to begin their experience of the justice system with adults instead of receiving the mental and educational support that children require.

Changing our misguided system of automatically charging youth as adults will codify our understanding that children deserve education, deserve mental health support, and deserve our compassion to help them finish growing up and become the best version of themselves. Understanding, unfortunately, that some children will still end up in the adult system, I applaud the efforts to reduce those numbers significantly.

For these reasons, **I respectfully urge this committee to return a favorable report on SB#0323, the Youth Charging Reform Act.**