



**Testimony before the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
February 4, 2026**

**Senate Bill 323 - Juvenile Court – Jurisdiction
Youth Charging Reform Act**

SUPPORT

On behalf of the National Association of Social Workers, Maryland Chapter (NASW-MD), we would like to express our support for Senate Bill 323 - Juvenile Court - Jurisdiction - Youth Charging Reform Act.

In FY25, Maryland charged more than 1,000 youth as if they were adults. The vast majority were charged automatically, based solely on the charge at the time of arrest, and then sent to juvenile court after a judge reviewed their case. Maryland sends more youth, ages 14-17, to adult court – automatically, without input from a judge – than any other state except Alabama.

Starting juvenile cases in juvenile court saves time and money. Less than 13% of youth charged in adult court end up with an adult criminal conviction. The automatic filing process is extremely expensive and time consuming, costing over \$20 million a year. Research shows that providing timely, appropriate rehabilitative services to youth is associated with better outcomes, including lower recidivism, compared with extended detention or delayed support.

This legislation will reduce crime and increase safety. Adult charging results in increased physical violence, sexual violence, and isolation. Research shows that youth charged as adults are at increased risk of physical and sexual assault and isolation from their families, which may contribute to future criminality. Reducing automatic charging of kids as adults protects kids and improves their long-term social-emotional outcomes.

This will also assist with addressing racial disparities. Over 77% of youth charged in adult court in Maryland are Black. Black youth are more likely to be sent to adult prison and receive longer sentences than their white counterparts for similar offenses. Implicit bias research shows that Black kids are more likely to be seen and treated as adults than white kids. Eliminating automatic charging can also reduce the school to prison pipeline for black youth.

NASW joins the Maryland Youth Justice Coalition and many other partners who support the 2026 effort to limit automatic charging.

We urge you to vote YES on SB 323.

Respectfully,

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