

SB 0323

Juvenile Court – Jurisdiction (Youth Charging Reform Act)

Position - Favorable

January 30, 2026

To the Honorable Chair and Members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee

My name is Lesley Frost and I am the Chair of National Council of Jewish Women, Maryland State Policy Advocacy Committee (NCJW MD SPA) and I am writing to express strong support for SB 0323 Juvenile Court - Jurisdiction (Youth Charging Reform Act).

The NCJW advocates across Maryland support an end to automatic charging or "auto-charging" one of several ways that people under 18 years old are sent into the adult criminal legal system. Currently, "automatic charging" sends juveniles (ages 14+) to adult court for serious crimes (like murder, rape, armed robbery) or certain gun/traffic offenses. It is estimated of those juveniles automatically ordered into the adult system, 85% of those cases will be dismissed or sent back down to juvenile court.

While in the adult system juveniles are segregated for safety which means they are placed in solitary confinement, without access to developmentally appropriate services available in the state department of juvenile justice. Sending youth to the adult criminal justice system, for any offense, harms their wellbeing and community safety.

We agree with the Commission on Juvenile Justice Reform and Emerging & Best Practices that has approved its first formal recommendation in the report, Maryland's JJDPA Compliance Crisis-Children in Adult Detention, where they focus on improving Maryland's compliance with federal juvenile justice standards and strengthening the fairness and effectiveness of the state's youth justice system. The Commission also recommends an end to the practice of automatically charging youth as adults for certain crimes, saying it doesn't improve public safety and can harm the youth.

Judaism asks each of us to engage in a process of accountability and return, called "teshuvah" and NCJW, as the oldest Jewish grassroots organization in the USA, supports legislation that places juveniles in a system with rehabilitation and supportive services that can help them change and return to the community. On behalf of the 700 NCJW Advocates across the state, the NCJW MD SPA urges this committee to vote favorably on SB 0323.

Sincerely,

Lesley Frost

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