



Committee: Judicial Proceedings
Testimony: SB0323 – Juvenile Court - Jurisdiction (Youth Charging Reform Act)
Organization: Jewish Community Relations Council of Howard County, MD
Submitting: Laura Salganik, Chair
Position: FAVORABLE
Hearing Date: February 4, 2026

Dear Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and Committee Members:

The Jewish Community Relations Council is submitting this testimony in favor of SB0323. We favor ending the practice of automatically charging youth as adults.

Maryland sends more young people to adult court based on offense types than any other state per capita except Alabama. A major reason is that Maryland requires that some 14- and 15-year-olds and most 16- and 17-year-olds be automatically prosecuted in adult court for 33 offenses, putting us out of step with other states.

It may seem like youth who are accused of very serious crimes should be subject to the type of consequences that are designed for adults. However, as a strategy for deterring future criminal behavior, it is ineffective. It has been demonstrated that youth who are charged as adults have a higher recidivism rate when completing their sentences than those charged as juveniles for similar acts.

Similarly, charging juveniles as adults exacerbates racial inequities that begin with how young children are treated when they first enter school. In Maryland, over 77% percent of juveniles charged in adult courts are Black. And studies have shown that Blacks receive harsher sentences than Whites for the same acts.

As Jews, we are taught to pursue justice of all kinds. We do not believe the current system of automatic charging of youth as adults is just. It is high time to change it. We urge the committee to give a favorable report on SB0323.