

SB 0323

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FAVORABLE

Title: Juvenile Court-Jurisdiction (Youth Charging Reform Act)

Chair: William C. Smith, Judicial Proceedings Committee

Sponsored by Senators Smith, Hettleman, Love, Muse, Sydnor, and West

This testimony is written in [strong support](#) of Senate Bill 0323, Juvenile Court Jurisdiction (Youth Charging Reform Act).

I am a 37-year resident of MD and District 11B. I have worked with teenaged youth and observed them in various schools in the city and elsewhere for years as noted below. I am a parent, grandparent, great-grandparent, Eagle Scout & Silver Beaver Awardee, a long-time naturalist guide and the 1st Life Time Achievement Awardee from Irvine Nature Center which included nature programs with children in several schools in the city, a Red Hat volunteer for Habitat for Humanity in such Baltimore locations as Sandtown and East Baltimore (9+ years), an original CASA Ally, and an active member of the Social Justice Committee at our local congregation.

I personally thank JPR Chair Senator Will Smith, for reintroducing this bill this year that will reduce automatic referrals of juveniles to the adult court system. Maryland incarcerates more youth in adult prisons per capita than any other state than Alabama. It is time for reform that recognizes national best practice and finally aligns Maryland with federal law.

Current laws require that we automatically charge them as if they were adults, with long-term devastating results to the child, their families, and communities. It will also cost tax-payers less money as fewer youth will be held in adult detention for long periods of time isolated for their protection, receiving few services, no education, or treatment awaiting their hearing in the adult system.

It is well documented that this current practice “disproportionately impacts children of color, diverts resources away from critical services for children and families, places children in dangerous environments”- adult jails- “that more often result in subsequent violent or general criminal behavior.”

We have been waiting far too long for justice to be served in Maryland. It is now time to complete the process by approving SB0323.