

Favorable SB 323 – Juvenile Court - Jurisdiction (Youth Charging Reform Act)

Dear Honorable Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Linda Girdner and I am a resident of Gambrills, MD in Anne Arundel County. I am writing in support of **SB 323 – Juvenile Court - Jurisdiction (Youth Charging Reform Act)**.

As a mental health professional, I am strongly against the incarceration of youth in adult facilities. As far as I am concerned it is a violation of the 8th Amendment against cruel and unusual punishment.

Oftentimes these youth have already experienced life's hard knocks and need to be in environments that can support their healing, education, and positive connection. If they can't get that, then at least get them away from being incarcerated with adults, some who will abuse them. Also they should not be put in solitary confinement. Do you think that juveniles will be prepared for a law-abiding life after incarceration by being around adult criminals? No!

Currently, when a young person is charged with a crime, there are approximately 30 charges that automatically put them in the adult system, bypassing the juvenile justice system. In the adult system, youth are exposed to harsher and more traumatizing experiences. More than 60% of youth charged as adults are ultimately waived back down into the juvenile system, by this time they have already endured months of dehumanization by being placed in the adult system. We advocate that all youth who are charged with a crime begin in the juvenile justice system and in order to be placed in the adult system, must have a hearing in front of a judge where they decide that it is necessary for the youth to be waived up.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the committee to issue a **favorable report** on **SB 323**.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Linda Girdner, Ph.D.

941 Fall Ridge Way

Gambrills, MD 21054

410-999-7892