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TESTIMONY ON SB323 - POSITION: FAVORABLE
Juvenile Court - Jurisdiction (Youth Charging Reform Act)

TO: Chair Smith, Vice Chair Waldstreicher, and members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee

FROM: Mara Greengrass

My name is Mara Greengrass. I am a resident of District 18. I am submitting this testimony in support of SB323, Juvenile Court - Jurisdiction (Youth Charging Reform Act).

I'm a lifelong Maryland resident, a member of Congregation Beth El of Montgomery County, and I believe very strongly in the Jewish idea of teshuvah, or repentance. The rabbis teach us that repentance is always possible for any perpetrator of a crime and our job as a society is to make that journey as easy as we can. Harsh punishments and unfair treatment of those convicted in adult court make it *harder* for teshuvah to occur, because there is no incentive to repent or make restitution. This is even more true when a child or teenager is sent to adult court.

Neuroscience clearly shows that children and teens have a less mature limbic system and prefrontal cortex, which combine with environmental and hereditary factors to make them more prone to irrational or improper actions. But it doesn't require a college degree to know that...anyone with kids knows their minds aren't fully formed and has seen that lead them in the wrong direction sometimes. It's not a disaster if it leads them to eating the last cupcake, but a teen whose older sibling is involved in less savory activities may be influenced into the same.

And given that budget woes are on the top of everyone's mind, this bill to prevent the autocharging of juveniles in adult court would seem to be an easy thing to support, because it would save the state money. We know that the vast majority of kids who are sent directly to adult court end up being sent back to juvenile court, wasting everyone's limited time (e.g., judges, attorneys, administrative staff) and the state's very limited funding.

Children and teens should be sent to juvenile court first, no matter their age or the crime they were involved in. Let the juvenile court staff, who are the most qualified, decide which teens should be sent to adult court. **I respectfully urge this committee to return a favorable report on SB323.**