

Linda Watts

Several months ago, I was sitting at a BRIDGE Maryland meeting, when Rev. Tilghman stood up and started talking about the Netflix series "When They See Us". I had started watching the series earlier that same week but found that I just had to turn it off because it was so painful. As the police were interrogating the young men, I looked at their faces and saw my grandson.

He is a 17 year old who came to our family as a foster child with his younger sister at the age of 5 and was subsequently adopted.

Like most 17 year olds, he is full of himself, thinking he knows everything one moment and yet a people pleaser trying to find the approval of others that he never had from his birth mother the next. I recently heard a high school principal refer to young men at this age as "Numbskulls" because they continually do the same things over and over again because they think that the next time the consequences will be different. But this is my "Numbskull" and he is my "Heart".

This Netflix series gave me a whole new level of fear.

I came home from that meeting and I watched the whole series. I knew I needed to know more. I did research on the current law in Maryland. I did research on adolescent response to interrogation. I found a lot of court cases where juveniles interrogations were thrown out by courts because juveniles did not have the capacity to waive Miranda rights or they were coerced by law enforcement, or their confessions were unreliable.

I had always assumed that as a juvenile, if he were to be picked up on the street, the first call would be to his parents. He cannot legally sign a contract in the State of Maryland. He could not marry in the State of Maryland without his parent's permission. He cannot withdrawal from school without his parent's permission. He cannot serve in the military. These provisions are in place to keep to keep him from making decisions that could jeopardize his future. Why would he be subjected to police questioning without his parents being notified that he was in custody? Why would we assume that if he can't read and sign a contract, he would be capable of truly understanding the Miranda warning?

HB 624 would provide my grandson the protection that he needs as a minor. In addition, to the age-appropriate Miranda and the immediate notification of parents, this bill would mandate that interrogation could not begin without a consultation with legal counsel. My grandson's parents would have insisted on legal counsel, but what of the son of a single working mom, who may not be able to just walk off her job for fear of losing her only income source. This bill protects her child and all children by requiring legal consultation BEFORE interrogation.

I respectfully request that this committee vote to bring HB 624 to the floor.

My grandson needs you. Your sons and grandsons need you. Your daughters and granddaughters need you.