



Senate Bill 853 - Juvenile Justice Reform
Judicial Proceedings Committee
FAVORABLE

March 3, 2021

To Chair Clippinger and Members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee:

On behalf of Strong Future Maryland, we write in support of SB853. Strong Future Maryland works to advance bold, progressive policy changes to address systemic inequality and promote a sustainable, just and prosperous economic future for all Marylanders.

For many decades, the United States has utilized mass incarceration as a form of accountability and a means to end crime. Believing that immediate consequences, a sentence in prison through the justice system would achieve results. [Research](#) has shown us that exposing young children to juvenile jail and youth prisons does not reverse behavior, but serves as short-term punitive action that does not prevent future offenses and rather exacerbates detrimental effects on development with the potential for worse offenses.

For too long, instead of investing in education, our country chose to invest in cages to lock children away out of fear and out of retribution. However, with current research, there are effective programs that prioritize accountability through mentorship, education, and family-focused interventions that have the power to proactively prevent re-arrest. Strong Future Maryland supports SB853 because it minimizes the exposure to juvenile detention centers for pre-adolescent children who are convicted of low-level crimes and alternatively gives these children an opportunity for rehabilitation.

What we have learned over the course of this session is that while witnesses have had differing opinions on juvenile justice reform, we can all agree that trauma begets trauma when there is no effective intervention. Strong Future Maryland urgently believes that effective intervention is reform and rehabilitation, not youth imprisonment. With a disproportionate number of Black children in Maryland incarcerated, we have to acknowledge that a significant number of these youth have also experienced intergenerational trauma or violence themselves. Instead of community-based programs too many are pipelined in a cyclical system of

info@strongfuturemd.org

PO Box 164 | Arnold MD 21012

240-643-0024 | strongfuturemd.org

@FutureMaryland @StrongFutureMD

incarceration, with an increased chance of recidivism. The state of Maryland must begin to take steps to divert children out of the criminal legal system and intervene with evidence-based programming to support youth and prosper our communities.

The members of the committee have the choice to divest in carceral methods and invest in children, their development and their future. We believe that criminal justice reform is a necessity, especially for our youth offenders. SB853 is legislation that moves Maryland a step forward towards juvenile justice reform. Ultimately, policies that were ineffective punitive tools to augment systemic racism must be replaced with initiatives that offer a fundamental change to our state prisons.

We respectfully urge a favorable report.

On behalf of Strong Future Maryland,

John B. King

Alice Wilkerson

Ruth Lee

Founder & Board Chair

Executive Director

Policy Fellow