



LAW ENFORCEMENT ACTION PARTNERSHIP

ADVANCING JUSTICE AND PUBLIC SAFETY SOLUTIONS

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Date: February 4, 2021

Re: SB 136 - Maryland Juvenile Interrogation Protection Act

Position: SUPPORT

To: The Maryland Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

Distinguished Committee Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of SB 136 today. I am here to represent my own views as a retired detective from the Baltimore Police Department and as a speaker for the Law Enforcement Action Partnership (LEAP). LEAP is a nonprofit group of police, prosecutors, judges, and other criminal justice professionals who speak from firsthand experience. Our mission is to make communities safer by focusing law enforcement resources on the greatest threats to public safety and working toward healing police-community relations.

This legislation is important to me because of my experience working with community members and children. In addition to my public safety career, I am the founder and executive director of Unified Efforts Inc. Our "Out of School Time" violence prevention program provides in-school activities and programs to children for no cost to their parents. So juvenile justice is an issue that is near and dear to my heart.

I am speaking in support of SB 136 because it will positively impact police-community trust. If we interrogate children without giving them access to proper protection such as having an attorney present, the families of the children and the community will feel that the police are taking advantage of them. Juveniles are impressionable and they are known to confess to crimes they did not commit under interrogation. A single instance of incarcerating an innocent child can turn an entire community against the police.

As a detective, I quickly learned that police-community trust is essential to public safety. We are only as strong as our relationships with the public,

LawEnforcementActionPartnership.org

Formerly known as Law Enforcement Against Prohibition

because we prevent and solve crime based on information from witnesses and victims. When our officers come knocking, nobody will open the door and talk if they're angry because police are interrogating children without an attorney present. Victims won't even report crime -- a recent report found that more than half of all violent crimes went unreported between 2006 and 2010.¹ To increase crime reporting and information sharing, we need to take action to improve police-community trust.

Unnecessary incarceration resulting from juvenile interrogation will also have long-term effects on involvement in the justice system. Children who are incarcerated are more likely to reoffend than those who are kept in the community. [A Council of State Governments report](#) found that up to 80 percent of incarcerated juveniles are rearrested within 3 years of release. Upon release, most juveniles do not complete high school, which greatly decreases their chances of finding stable employment and staying out of the justice system.

Instead of increasing the snowball effect of involving children in the justice system, our legislature should fund early intervention programs that have a proven record of success in preventing root causes of violence and reducing recidivism.

In sum, due to my experience with juveniles and public safety, I believe that the proposed bill, SB 136, will strengthen police relationships with the community. Juvenile interrogations fuel distrust in the communities we need to protect and serve. It is time to invest in prevention instead of punishment.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my experience in support of this bill.

Detective Debbie Ramsey (Ret.)
Baltimore Police Department, Maryland
Speaker, Law Enforcement Action Partnership